

This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES
3 3433 07494738 7





THE HAPPY VALLEY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

DIANA BARRINGTON

TERENCE

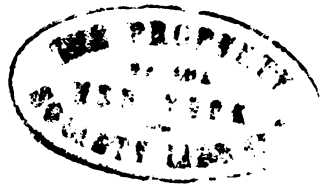
PEGGY OF THE BARTONS

THE CATSPAW

ANGEL

A STATE SECRET

JOHANNA





NO DOUBT THAT SHEET OF PAPER HELD HER SECRET

THE HAPPY VALLEY

BY

B. M. CROKER

"TO NOROWAY O'ER THE FAEM"

WITH A FRONTISPIECE

METHUEN & CO.
36 ESSEX STREET W.C.
LONDON
1904



THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
78400B

First published in 1904

COPYRIGHT, 1904, BY B. M. CROKER IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

DEDICATED

TO

A. E. WHITAKER

IN REMEMBRANCE

OF A HAPPY TIME

IN A VALLEY

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	LEFT TO CHANCE	1
II.	I ANNOUNCE MY PLANS	9
III.	MISS RIVERS	20
IV.	ALL ABOARD	35
V.	THE MAN AT BERGEN	47
VI.	ON THE GREEN STEAM LAUNCH	62
VII.	THE FIRST FISH	75
VIII.	AS UNDERSTUDY	83
IX.	THE PEOPLE DOWN BELOW	93
X.	THE FIFTH ROD	106
XI.	LOG-ROLLING EXTRAORDINARY	120
XII.	THE AMERICAN WOMAN	136
XIII.	A DIAMOND BROOCH	151
XIV.	THE BEAUTY AT THE BRIDGE	163
XV.	AN UNEXPECTED ESCORT	173
XVI.	"DRESSING UP"	181
XVII.	TWO DISCOVERIES	195
XVIII.	ULAF THE CARPENTER	206
XIX.	A DELICATE MISSION	212
XX.	THE STRANGER	226
XXI.	PRINCE CHARMING	239

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXII.	THE LAST STRAW	245
XXIII.	TWO STORIES	261
XXIV.	THE NEW NURSE	277
XXV.	BRANKSOME OF MEERUT	286
XXVI.	THE QUEST ENDS	294
XXVII.	GOOD-BYE, RANDVAL	308

THE HAPPY VALLEY

CHAPTER I

LEFT TO CHANCE

ON a certain dull morning towards the end of May, among the pile of letters accompanying my early tea, I found an envelope marked "urgent," and, tearing it open, read the following despatch:—

"BRUNSWICK MANSIONS,
VICTORIA STREET, S.W.
(*Tuesday night*)

"DEAR RACHEL,—Prepare for a shock! I am about to take your breath away! Will you join my party to Norway on the 10th of next month? One of the rods has failed me, and if you care to step into his shoes, I am giving you the first offer. You have often wondered what sort of life we lead in our so-called 'Happy Valley.' I hereby invite you, as paying guest, to come and see. Come and live among us for ten weeks, and share all our little joys and sorrows. (There are, strictly speaking, no sorrows.)

The experience will be a healthy change from the treadmill of a London season. The scenery is magnificent, the life Arcadian, the air invigorating. You will be astonished at your own energy and appetite. On the other hand, I think it but fair to warn you that the 'daily round' is simple—possibly to a non-fisher monotonous, if not dull.

"There will be no room for your fine maid, no occasion for your fine feathers. A stout stick and a pair of strong boots will take the place of your electric brougham. But in spite of all these deficiencies I have a presentiment that you will thoroughly enjoy the trip, and find a summer in Norway an agreeable break in the programme of a society woman, who goes through the social year like a squirrel in a cage. Let me have a wire, 'yes' or 'no,' by ten o'clock, for I am a person of prompt action, and the rods on my water are in urgent demand.

"This party will be composed of General Bassett, an old adherent, who on this occasion will be accompanied by his niece. Hitherto I have set my face sternly against girls—they complicate everything; but as the General has made it a personal matter, for once I have succumbed. Then there is Mr. Harold Hopkins, who came out last year, a bachelor of thirty, enormously rich and helplessly shy, plain, and unattractive, but a good soul and a finished fisherman. We have also Mr. Gregory Clegg, an old hand in Norway; myself (needless to add), conductor, hostess, and ruler; and Rachel Bosworth, if she is a wise woman, will make up the required half-dozen—and

an unusually promising little party. If your answer is 'yes,' I shall expect you to tea and talk at four sharp. "Your affectionate friend,

"JOAN VALDY"

This brusque and unexpected invitation had the effect of thoroughly opening my drowsy eyes. My affectionate friend Joan Valdy was also a connection, who had married a retired naval officer many years her senior. Captain Valdy had been consumed by a passion for fishing, and had speedily initiated his wife into the mysteries of tying and throwing flies. It was not long before Joan caught his ardour and became as indefatigable an angler as himself. Each summer the eager couple repaired to a certain haunt on a Norwegian river, from whence they returned in late autumn, full of health and complacency, distributing spoils of dried salmon among their expectant friends. After many delightful seasons Captain Valdy died rather suddenly. His widow was overwhelmed with grief; in one blow she had lost not only a husband to whom she was warmly attached, but a pursuit to which she was almost equally devoted.

During ten summers in Norway Mrs. Valdy had made numbers of friends, and from these she was now to be as completely separated, as if the grave had also closed over them.

Ever a brisk, energetic, not to say managing, crea-

ture, Joan was left on a painfully narrow income to face the world alone, to sit with idle hands in a gloomy little house in West Kensington, and there to contemplate her dreary prospects.

Captain Valdy's property was strictly entailed, and went to the next-of-kin, a total stranger, and as he had been lavishly hospitable, and never happy unless his house was full of guests, he had not put by a penny; for the hale and hearty sailor had anticipated a green old age, and all that remained to his desolate widow was a small pension, the lease of their fishing on the Rande River, and the remembrance of happier days.

At first Joan was prostrated with grief, but her disposition was naturally elastic; she was ever one to be up and doing. By the end of the month she had somewhat recovered her poise, and was prepared to face the future. It was precisely at this psychological moment that a shrewd adviser made a bold suggestion, and urged that instead of advertising her fishing Joan should keep house and river in her own hands, and take in paying guests. By this means she could contrive to enjoy her favourite sport, meet her old friends, and possibly make a little money! Thereupon ensued a shrill outcry, an exchange of some forcible letters, and considerable demur to the project, for both Joan and her late husband were what is called "highly connected," but the connections were, on the whole, good worldly folk, who gradually

realised that it was better to have a relative who received "paying guests" than that the said relative should be quartered among *them*, an impecunious and non-paying inmate, for lengthy and indefinite periods.

The clever little widow pounced upon the idea like a hawk on a heron. Here was something to think of besides that new white tombstone in Kensal Green, and she threw herself into the project with extraordinary zeal; her friends found her suitable clients, and she did the rest herself. Randval fishing had now been a notable guest-house for six years, and the experiment a magnificent success: sport was unfailing, quarters were comfortable, the cook a treasure. Here men were spared the detestable fag of catering, procuring boats, boatmen, and ponies.

Moreover, Mrs. Valdy spoke Norwegian like a native; she was a keen sportswoman, a pleasant hostess, and altogether a sensible creature, with remarkably sound ideas respecting smoking and late suppers.

Naturally the good lady's fame went far; the demand for rods on her water greatly exceeded the supply. Competitors who were once chief friends had been known to quarrel very, very bitterly over Mrs. Joan Valdy—that is to say, her fishing—and various selfish clients kept the delights and "address" of Randval exclusively to themselves.

And now I was bidden to join the happy party in the Happy Valley, should I go? Yes or no? I lay in bed with my eyes fixed upon the ceiling, endeavouring to marshal impartially before my mental eye the various *pros* and *cons*. Against, were sundry social engagements—but from these I could readily excuse myself. There was also the distance from London, erratic postal arrangements, the reputed horrors of the North Sea, and the monotony at which Joan had hinted. Well, existence could not be more monotonous than the daily round of my twentieth London season! I would visit a new land, mix with a new nationality, shake off convention along with my chiffons, and view life from a different standpoint than a smart little bandbox in Berkeley Street, W. To me the process of making up my mind has ever been a woeful business, and the older I grow the more unsatisfactory and protracted is the struggle.

For instance, in the matter of clothes. I will hold a solemn conference with my *modiste*, Madame Chenille, select model, style, stuff, and date for fitting. And yet scarcely have I reached home before I am seized with agonised misgivings, and regret that I did not order what I mentally term "the other one."

And it is precisely the same with respect to hats, wraps, and mantles. I lack the moral courage to return to the shop and boldly announce that I have "changed my mind," and though I believe I am considered to be a well-dressed woman, half the time

I am invested in costumes that I loathe, and nearly every gown that I wear might be styled the "gown of repentance," it is generally crowned by the "hat of regrets"!

The effect of this brusque demand for a "yea" or "nay" decision within a time limit of an hour, had, naturally, an excruciating effect on a creature as vacillating and "wind blown" as myself! At one moment the question was definitely settled—I could not possibly accept Joan's invitation. How was I to throw over the Lascelles? and there was Queenie Hamilton's wedding coming off. Of course, I must wire "no," and go to the Carberys' concert in the afternoon. But no sooner was this decided, when came Norway herself, a beautiful yet tragic figure, describing with eloquence her fjords, mountains, forests, and whispering, "Oh, foolish woman, here is your one and only opportunity of seeing *me*."

My head began to ache and throb with the effort of hard thinking, and yet I failed to make up my mind. At last, in an anguish of despair, I resolved to leave the question to chance. Oh! if I had only a coin to toss,—but I never take my purse to bed. Brilliant idea! I would refer the matter to the wall-paper, a design of pretty bunches of roses entangled in blue ribbons. If the roses counted an even number along the top line between the two windows, that would stand for England—odd numbers for Norway.

One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight

—nine—ten—*eleven!* It was Norway! Yes; and in order that I should have no possible chance of again altering my decision, I rang for my maid and a telegraph form. In another five minutes the reply was on its way to Joan, and my answer was, "With pleasure; expect me at four.—RACHEL"

CHAPTER II

I ANNOUNCE MY PLANS

I WAS surprised to discover that the more I contemplated the project of going to Norway, the more that prospect pleased me, and as Paulette was brushing my still abundant locks I actually caught myself smiling into the looking-glass! And here, in case of misconception, I hasten to describe the vision which the mirror reflected.

I see above a coquettish pink dressing-jacket the careworn visage of a woman of forty, I see deep lines about her mouth, I see crow's feet, I see grey hairs. A chiselled nose—that most lasting of features—iron-grey eyes, with good brows and lashes, are all that now remain of what people once upon a time described as "great beauty." Yes; the cheeks are woefully sunken, the complexion is completely gone, traces of corroding grief are printed on my countenance! (I look elderly, yet feel strangely and absurdly young!) I am gazing into the somewhat haughty face of a wan and haggard old maid!

An old maid of large fortune and wide acquaintance,

with no near kindred, no serious occupation, and, when all is said and done, a solitary soul!

Perhaps I have drawn my portrait with too sharp a pen. In full evening toilette, with the family diamonds sparkling on my hair and neck, my collar-bones decently veiled in priceless lace, my slender figure swathed in a French "creation," I still present a sufficiently distinguished appearance.

As my thoughts returned to dwell pleasantly on "Norraway across the seas," my eyes caught those of Paulette. She was peering at me with an expression of grim disapproval. To see a woman of my age smirking at herself in the looking-glass was doubtless to awaken in her breast grave suspicions of my sanity! At last she said, in a shrill, tart voice: "Madame Chenille has written to say she can give you a fitting for your Ascot gown at three o'clock, and she will send to Paris for the fringe."

"Oh, I shall not require it after all," I replied; "you had better let her know at once."

"But Ascot, mademoiselle."

"I am not going to Ascot this year," I interrupted; "I have made other plans, and start for Norway this day fortnight."

"Norway!" she repeated, giving my hair a violent tug. "Yachting trip?"

"No. I am joining a fishing party."

"Mademoiselle *fishing?*" and there was a gleam of derision on her usually sour, dark face.

"I shall want but few clothes," I resumed; "some tailor-made and linen gowns—and I shall not take you."

"But mademoiselle *must* take me," she objected, in a triumphant key; "she cannot do her hair."

"Oh, I shall manage," I replied recklessly; "I can wear my hair anyhow in Norway—in two plaits if I choose; it is the fashion there."

"But it will look ver' ugly," she objected.

"That is of no consequence."

"If mademoiselle has decided to go to Norway, she will find it a *triste* country—ver' dark and cold; she will want furs and snow-shoes, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"I am not going to Lapland," I answered shortly.

Paulette's response was an incredulous sniff, and this sniff concluded our conversation.

After breakfast and the morning papers, I went upstairs in order to interview Mrs. Beckington, my chaperon and companion, who never descended before midday. When I was a young and wealthy orphan Mrs. Beckington had been solemnly installed in this position by my guardians, who believed that she would hold the post for a very brief period and that I would soon displace her by a companion for life. But seventeen years had elapsed and found us still associated; we suited one another exceedingly well. Mrs. Beckington (who preferred that I should call her "Cousin Lucy") was the widow of a distant relative—all my relatives were, so to speak, distant—

who had lost a considerable fortune in a company swindle and suddenly descended from riches to poverty. My situation proved an agreeable change to poor Cousin Lucy, who had already begun to experience the cruel little nip of penury, the humiliation of social neglect, and the return to a soft, luxurious nest was an indescribable happiness.

Mrs. Beckington liked London so much that she could barely endure to leave it for her annual month at Harrogate; thus she always kept the house open, and a permanent home for me.

On this particular morning I found the old lady already dressed and presenting a charming picture. She was seventy years of age, yet slim and upright, quite the handsomest chaperon in our set, and agreeably alive to the fact; her hair was as white as snow, her little sharp eyes as blue as forget-me-nots. She selected her toilettes with peculiar care; her gowns came from Bond Street, her bonnets from Paris.

Old lace was the darling passion of her declining years; her collection was her craze, and many delightful hours were spent in sorting or exhibiting the contents of her lace-box. Her happiest moments were when she entered a crowded company and felt assured that the time she had expended on her toilet had not been labour in vain, and that her velvet, her laces, and her flashing diamonds were duly appreciated and admired.

Oh! vanity is not solely the prerogative of youth! Cousin Lucy was easy-going, amiable, and cultivated. She never said anything spiteful or disagreeable, unless it was on the subject of some other old rival's *point de Venise* or Mechlin. She much enjoyed doing the honours of my small house; she liked cards, conversation, and "little attentions," but one hideous phantom had ever pursued her and disturbed her mind, that was the spectre of my possible marriage. Happily, this horror had entirely ceased to haunt her, since the appearance of my grey hairs.

It was in the form of a "little attention," such as she specially appreciated, that I had ascended to Cousin's Lucy's room, in order to inform her of my new plans. I found her seated at a table, carefully sorting out strips of exquisite old Valenciennes lace, which she was examining with a microscope and an air of almost pious attention.

"Going to Norway!" she exclaimed, suddenly turning the microscope on me. "What an insane idea! My love, you will find it frightfully rough. I cannot for the life of me imagine how you can leave your own delightful home, where you are surrounded with every comfort, to go scouring off to a wooden shanty, where you will live on rye bread and salt fish."

"I believe I shall enjoy the change," I replied. "I like the idea of Norway, and I like Joan Valdy."

"Well, I don't care for one or the other! In my humble opinion Mrs. Valdy completely lost caste by taking in lodgers. She has the most extraordinary masculine notions, and an abrupt 'take it or leave it' manner. I don't call her ladylike——"

"But very gentlemanly," I interrupted, with a laugh.

"It would have been far more becoming and befitting if she had taken a nice post as chaperon to one or two girls."

"Oh, she would hate that!" I protested. "She has nothing in common with girls."

"I daresay not! She's a most eccentric character, and I expect you will find yourself mixed up with a *very* queer set of people. Pray when are you off?"

"In about a fortnight."

"It will never surprise me to see you arriving back by the next steamer, you'll find it an awful change, my poor dear Rachel! You will have nothing but fish to eat, while the mosquitoes will eat *you*."

"You're as cheerful as Paulette!" I exclaimed. "One would suppose that I was going to live in an 'igloo' amongst the Esquimaux, and feast on seal and blubber. On the contrary, we shall be in a charming *châlet*, surrounded by acres of exquisite wild flowers, enjoying newly-caught salmon, delicious bread, and cream and strawberries."

"Will you?" she ejaculated, with a shrug of incredulity. "Well, I sincerely hope your expecta-

tions will be fulfilléd. Of course, it is to Joan Valdy's interest to *decoy* lodgers."

"Oh, fie! what an unkind speech, Cousin Lucy! But you have never liked Joan since she refused to sell you that wonderful old lace tippet which belonged to Marie Antoinette. It is an heirloom."

"Even so, I don't see what a woman who only affects serge and tweed can possibly want with a piece of lace like *that*. She is a dog in the manger —will neither wear it herself nor allow another woman to have that pleasure. Anyhow, I begrudge her carrying you away—I shall be so lonely."

"Oh, you must have a friend to stay—Mrs. Delamere or Miss Seymour Flatt—and you will have quite a good time! There are all the Ranelagh and Hurlingham ticket books, and heaps of concerts and 'at homes' are coming off."

"Very well, I shall write to Anabella Flatt to-day. I am sure she will be delighted to come. And what about Paulette?"

"I am giving her a holiday."

"Oh, are you?" and her pretty old face grew rather pink. "I was reckoning on her doing some little alterations and jobs for me!"

"Another time," I said, and airily kissing the tips of my fingers, I whisked out of the room.

That same afternoon, when I had despatched Cousin Lucy in the electric brougham *en route* to a bridge party, I walked across the Green Park and made my

way to Brunswick Mansions. Mrs. Valdy's flat was on the fifth floor, and it was exactly four o'clock when I touched her electric bell. The door was opened by a middle-aged woman who had been in Joan's service for years. "Crabbe" was a well-known character—parlour-maid in London, maid-of-all-work in Norway, and her mistress's right hand. (Crabbe is a dog's name, but some people declared that Crabbe was a cat. However, she never showed her claws to *me*.) She ushered me through the tiny hall into a spacious sitting-room with two windows. Seated before a bureau at one of these I found my friend, who was apparently very busy, the table being piled with all sorts of dockets, letters, bill files, store book prices, and lists.

"Well, Rachel," she exclaimed, turning quickly to greet me; "so you have decided to come! I am glad."

She took both my hands in hers as she added, "And I don't think you will *ever* repent it."

Joan was five years my senior, a wiry little woman with a square face and figure—that is to say, her shoulders, forehead, and chin were square. She had dark chestnut hair, quick grey eyes, a short nose, and a very firm mouth. There was not a single good feature in her face, but her expression was delightful, so bright and frank and honest. She generally wore a tailor-made coat and skirt, a shirt front, her husband's signet-ring and watch and chain; a fluffy

garment or a feather boa would have looked as much out of place on her as on a military statue.

"I'm frightfully busy," she continued, "so do excuse me for five minutes, and then we will have tea. I have told Crabbe that I am not at home. I am making out my store list, and I can't remember how many tins of oatmeal I took over last year." As she spoke she returned to her place and began to rustle among papers, whilst I subsided into a comfortable armchair.

The room was a reflection of Joan herself, and testified to her love of Norway and her taste for fishing. Over the chimney-piece hung a painting of the Hardanger Fjord; on the mantel-shelf were carvings, coloured photographs, and bits of silver. A painted dower chest stood between the windows; above it was the full-sized model of a salmon weighing forty-four pounds. A fat black cat, who sat on the table, was gazing at this trophy with eyes of passionate admiration. I noted a big fly book, a japanned tin, a tumbler of water with a piece of gut in it, and on a board in silk, feathers, and tinsel, the half-completed model of a brilliant impostor.

"What are your favourite biscuits?" asked Joan abruptly.

"Ginger cracknels," I answered, after a moment's hesitation.

"All right, you shall have them. I am sending off my list now, for all the stores must start ten days

ahead, and one has to be so careful not to forget things, as we are a hundred miles from the town. The list is my greatest and, indeed, my *only* worry."

"How can that be?" I asked.

"People are so cruelly capricious," she rejoined; "they invariably attack the point of the least resistance, and devour my most limited supplies. It is the contrariness of human nature!"

"But I don't understand," I repeated.

"Of course you don't; allow me to explain. One year there was a tremendous run on brawn, everyone clamouring and craving for it, refusing ham, tongue, or even sausages. Of course, the next year I took out a large stock, but they wouldn't touch it, and I had to eat the most of it myself. They all preferred a certain brand of tinned beef; and it is the same with jam—one season the cry is strawberries, the next it is apricots or nothing!"

"I am afraid you pamper them, Joan!"

"No, I only try to please people. For instance, General Bassett likes curry, Mr. Hopkins is fond of cold boiled bacon—have you any weakness?"

"I am not particular," I replied, "but Mr. Hopkins may have *my* share of cold bacon."

"One man who is coming has quite a reputation as a *bon vivant*," announced Joan; "however, I am *not* afraid."

"You should send him a line, and invite him to state wants."

Joan shook her head, and laughed.

"A hundred miles from a town, did you say?" I continued.

"Yes, by land and water—chiefly water. I have wired for your berth. This time of year the Hull boats are full."

"So you have burnt *my* boats?"

"Yes—to the water's edge," she answered solemnly; "and I hope you won't regret it. Here comes tea. Now, Sammy,"—to the cat—"get off the table! He is, as you see, madly in love with my salmon—always playing Romeo to her Juliet."

"*Her!*" I echoed. "Why her?"

"Because it is a hen salmon. I am so proud of that model! My arms were stiff for three days after my triumph."

"It is wonderfully well painted," I remarked; "just like a real live fish."

"So Sammy thinks. Now we will have tea, and I will tell you all about our plans, and the other paying guests."

CHAPTER III

MISS RIVERS

"IN the first place, there is General Bassett," commenced Joan, between two sips of tea. "I like him. He has been a regular visitor since I started. A dapper, gentlemanly little officer, and a most enthusiastic fisherman—he knows every pool in the river as well as I do myself."

"Yes," I assented, "the curry man! Unmarried?"

"Unmarried, but bringing out a niece—a girl of three-and-twenty. His sister-in-law has six daughters."

"I see; and the benevolent uncle is about to give one of them a treat?"

"That remains to be seen," declared Joan. "I never take in girls—'flappers,' as poor Tom called them. They are such a responsibility, but the General can look after his own niece. Then there is Harold Hopkins, a great, heavy, silent man, extraordinarily keen, and a really good sort, only son and heir of 'Hopkins' Porous Plaster' (you will see it advertised in half the fields in England); enormously rich."

"And yet he loves cold bacon? *On revient toujours à nos premiers amours!* Well, he will do quite nicely for Miss Bassett."

"Rachel, you are really too bad," she protested, in a somewhat sharp key. "If there was any chance of *that* sort of thing I shouldn't allow her to come. Thank goodness, Harold Hopkins, though a most worthy and excellent creature, is as dull as—as——" Joan had a trick of not finishing her sentences.

"A millionaire?" I suggested briskly.

"Do pray bear in mind that in one respect my Happy Valley is like heaven—there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage. People come out with one sole object—sport."

"Yes, to conjugate the verb 'to fish.' 'I fish, thou fishest, he fishes, we fish, ye or you fish, they fish.' But there is another sort of fishing, and if two birds with one stone, why not two fish with one hook?"

"I declare, you are too provoking," she exclaimed. "You have only to *see* the place to realise how ridiculous you are."

"Seeing will be believing, and I am not above learning—even at my age. Pray who is to be the fourth rod?"

"Mr. Gregory Clegg."

"Mr. Gregory Clegg? His name somehow grates on me. I am already prejudiced against him."

"My dear, you are hopeless! You might be a child of three!"

"I wish I were. No! on second thoughts I do not, for I should still be cutting my teeth and unable to read."

"I scarcely know Mr. Clegg myself," admitted Joan, handing me the sandwiches with a meditative air; "but I met him at dinner, and he was quite delightful."

"Then the dinner, I presume, was good?"

"Pray, how did you guess? Well, he has heard of Randval and bespoke a rod. He seems to be one of society's darlings, yet an enthusiastic fisherman, and I soon discovered that we had a good deal in common. We swear by the same varnish and the same flies. Black Jays and Dunham Rangers. And it was quite a—a——"

"Flirtation!" I suggested.

"Really, Rachel, how can you? For your age you are very——"

"Volatile! Why not?" I demanded. "I believe I shall flirt with the 'curry' General, and leave the 'Porous Plaster' for Miss Bassett."

"Captain Fleming *was* coming," resumed Joan, coldly ignoring my speech; "but his wound has been so troublesome the doctor said 'no.' I am sorry, he is such a nice fellow—he was badly hit at Spion Kop, and has to be careful. I gave his place to you, and now the party is complete. I do hope you will not find it dull; mind you bring out a lot of books. We generally exchange with the other lodges."

"What other lodges?" I inquired. "I thought you were monarch of all you surveyed?"

"No, indeed," rejoined Joan; "I have only eight miles of the Rande—the middle and best piece of the river. Above me is a small fishing, which a surly old man rents every year. About three miles below us is another beat for three rods. At the mouth of the river there is a large place like a country house, with hot-water pipes and a billiard-room. It holds a number of smart people, who don't fish seriously. They sit in boats and harl with two rods and read novels; they play bridge, and have bicycles and a piano. We have nothing in common, and see very little of them. This year the fishing is let to a Sir Robert Guise, a man of old family, but she is a *nouveau riche*. They are rather smart society people, and bound to have a house full—I am sorry." Just at this moment the door opened, and Crabbe announced "Mrs. Thoroughgood."

Joan, stifling an exclamation, rose, and with a hypocritical smile went forward to receive her guest, a tall, stately woman, with an imposing aquiline nose and a pair of sleepy brown eyes. The lady was the wife of an M.P. I knew her slightly, and had frequently seen her on the Terrace. Undoubtedly Mrs. Thoroughgood employed an *artiste* to dress her, and gave one the impression of elaborate elegance. She wore a wonderful mist-coloured toilet, and had a peculiarly soft voice and a reposeful manner. It

seemed as if a sudden hush had fallen upon the room.

"I heard that you were going to Devonshire to-morrow," she began. "I have dropped Henry at the House, and drove on here in the hopes of finding you at home, as I am afraid I shall be out of town when you return from Norway."

"How very nice of you, Mrs. Thoroughgood. How did you know I was off?"

"Geoffrey Fleming told me; he is my cousin. Poor fellow, he is so dreadfully disappointed; but he is not fit to travel, much less to fish."

"Yes, casting all day with a heavy rod is no joke," assented Joan, as she poured out tea for her visitor.

Then we began to talk indifferently of the weather, the Academy, and the latest women's club, but it was a formal, forced conversation.

I had an instinct to my very finger-tips that Mrs. Thoroughgood had a special reason for this call, and something important to discuss. After quite a lengthy pause she said, "I believe you are very fond of Norway, are you not, Mrs. Valdy?"

"Yes," acquiesced Joan, "I am, and ought to be—I owe it much. So many happy years when my husband was alive—it is another life, I feel a different being out there. After poor Tom's death I seemed to come to the end of everything. Only for Norway, I believe I should have gone mad."

Mrs. Thoroughgood now fixed her languid eyes upon Joan with a gaze of indescribable interest.

"Yes, the quiet was so soothing after the roar and bustle of London—not a sound to be heard but the cow-bells in the forest and the rushing of the river. The stillness seemed to heal my grief. You cannot imagine the peace and contentment that Randval has given *me*."

Mrs. Thoroughgood inclined her head, and leaning her stately person a few inches nearer to Joan, said with obvious hesitation, "You have not filled up Geoffrey's place, and I know a girl who would be glad to join your party."

"Oh, but my dear lady," declared Joan, drawing back as she spoke, "it is entirely against my principle to take girls—they are too great a care. With their delicate constitution, delicate complexions, delicate hearts!—and, anyway, the vacancy has been filled by my friend Miss Bosworth."

Mrs. Thoroughgood coloured faintly, and as she glanced at me I read in her expression a really grave disappointment.

"I didn't know that you were a fisherwoman," she remarked in her soft, slow voice, and her eyes travelled over my elaborate French garment with an air of vexed interrogation.

"Nor am I," I replied; "I am only going as a visitor to explore the country. Mrs. Valdy has

allowed me to join the party in the capacity of a looker-on."

"Lookers-on see most of the game," added Joan, with a laugh. "Unfortunately there will be no game to see! I am really sorry I cannot take your friend, but six is my limit—and girls are taboo."

"Oh, but Mrs. Valdy," protested the visitor, "I am told that you have made an exception in favour of Miss Bassett."

Joan's mouth assumed a grim look, which I knew from years of experience denoted what she called "firmness."

"Could you not again make another exception—just for once? I am so anxious for this young friend of mine to have a complete change. In your hands I know she will be so safe. I feel sure you would like her, for she would not be the smallest trouble, and is so sweet and sensible and good-looking."

"Oh, I don't care a snap for good looks," rejoined Joan brusquely; "does she fish?"

"Oh, yes," was the eager, but unlucky response; "she is a first-rate fisherwoman."

"Then that quite settles it," cried Mrs. Valdy with decision; "I have only water for five rods at a pinch."

"And money is no object," faltered Mrs. Thoroughgood, making a desperate effort; then added, almost under her breath, "she would pay double if that would induce you to—to——"

"I make no difference in my terms," interrupted

Joan stiffly; "I am really afraid it could not possibly be managed."

Mrs. Thoroughgood glanced at me with unmistakable significance, and I realised that she wished to speak with Joan privately, and had something to say which was reserved for her ear alone.

In obedience to her signal, I immediately rose, and began drawing on my gloves.

"Oh, but Rachel, you must not go!" said Joan, stretching out a detaining arm. "I may not see you again before we start, and I have hundreds of matters to arrange."

Thus commanded I resumed my seat with the feeling of intense discomfort—the inevitable sensation of the "one too many." Well, at any rate, whatever the other woman had to divulge, she could do so by letter. I could see that she was not pleased with me as she arranged her feather stole, and pulled at her turquoise chain. Presently she gave a little dry cough and commenced, "Mrs. Valdy, I am going to beg you to take this young friend of mine as a very great favour to *me*." A moment's pause, during which she pulled the feathers out of her boa with a sort of feverish energy, and then she continued, "It is rather a delicate subject, and I do hope you will forgive me if I presume to recall, that once upon a time my husband was able to give Captain Valdy a hint, which saved him from the loss of an investment, and you said—er—you—said——"

"Yes, yes," broke in Joan impetuously, "I remember it perfectly—I was, and am, most grateful to Mr. Thoroughgood, and I am ashamed, that you should have to remind me of an obligation. If it is a personal matter, and the young lady is a relation of yours, I will endeavour to squeeze somehow, and I will give her a share of my own fishing."

This was more than generous—it was noble, it was magnificent!

"The girl is no relation," admitted the visitor; "but she is my god-daughter, and I am deeply interested in her, and anxious that she should accompany your party. The doctors have ordered her absolute change, and to get away altogether from familiar places and surroundings; it will do her good to be a stranger in a strange land. There was some idea of a long sea voyage, but it has been relinquished."

"Is she, then, an invalid?" inquired Joan anxiously.

"Not at all. Physically she is as strong as a horse, but she has recently had a terrible mental shock, and does not seem to be recovering—in fact, she is in such a state of depression that we are all seriously alarmed. I have taken her to see the best specialist, Sir Thomas Thomas. He has suggested her going to some foreign country and living amongst total strangers, hoping that in this way she will gather a store of new impressions, and recover her elasticity and spirits."

"Um—yes," muttered Joan in a doubtful tone.

"When I heard this prescription I immediately thought of Mrs. Valdy," proceeded the lady in an impressive manner; "I felt that she would have such a good chance with *you*."

"Her mind is not affected, is it?" inquired Joan, and her eyebrows were half-way up her square forehead. "It is not a mental case?"

"Oh no, not at all, but she is so sensitive that she may fret herself into consumption or melancholia. We want to get her away—from herself."

"It must have been a terrible grief."

"Well, not exactly grief; more of an experience, an awful experience."

There was a moment of silence; then she continued, "I think it so very kind of you to allow her to join you. I can guarantee that she will not give you any trouble. Her name is Enid Rivers; she is twenty-two years of age, and unusually clever and bright—indeed, she used to be quite a madcap!"

I wondered inwardly if the term now fitted her, minus the word "cap." I had my own private views, and felt decidedly distrustful of this extra rod, who so urgently required "change."

"Where are her belongings?" asked Joan.

"Oh," reddening as she answered, "they are county people who live down in Gloucestershire. Her mother was my dearest friend. Her father is dead. She lives with her grandfather and aunt. The poor girl is miserably unhappy now; she takes things terribly to

heart, but if she is on the river all day long, or rambling about and mixing with new acquaintances—a cheerful *entourage*—she is bound to outgrow her present condition."

"Poor child, I am sorry for her," said Joan, and looking over at me, she added, "Miss Bosworth, too, will sympathise—we have all had our love troubles—and——"

"But this is not a love trouble," hastily interrupted Mrs. Thoroughgood, "never was a love affair; but I feel sure you two kind people will be good to poor Enid, for she is greatly to be pitied."

Our eyes met again, as we murmured a brief assent.

"And now," said the visitor, rising as she spoke, "that is settled; and as I know you are busy, Mrs. Valdy, I won't take up more of your precious time."

Then she shook hands with me and effected a rustling and dignified departure, followed by Joan, who accompanied her to the lift.

"She is a curious, drawling sort of woman," remarked the latter when she reappeared, "but there is a good, kind heart under all her languid manners, and her Paris frocks. Her husband and Tom were great friends, and once he rescued us from losing a small fortune in the Scilly Isle Electric Trams. Tom was always so rash about investments, and as simple as a little child. I really do believe, but only for Peter Thoroughgood I should have been in an alms-

house to-day! He came to us once at Randval, and was enchanted with his visit."

"And now, to pay off an ancient debt of gratitude, you have undertaken the charge of his wife's most mysterious protégée."

"One must take risks sometimes," she responded, with a sigh.

"What can this mystery be?"

"I will leave you to unravel it, my dear; it will be something for you to do."

"Thank you very much, but I hope I am not likely to be so hard up for employment as to turn into a private detective. I shall certainly respect the girl's secret."

"If she has one! It would be so very much easier to be kind to her, if we had the faintest inkling of her trouble."

"It is not a love affair," I announced, ticking off the items on my fingers; "it is not ill-health, since she is as strong as a horse; it is not poverty, for she has offered to pay double—what can it be? Mrs. Thoroughgood called it an awful experience."

"Well, for my part," said Joan, "I should not be surprised, if there is a man—and a handsome young man—at the bottom of the whole business!"

"I don't agree with you at all," I rejoined; "that, would certainly come under the head of 'love affair.' Perhaps Miss Rivers has poisoned someone by mistake—or run over a child, on her motor?"

"Gifted and imaginative Rachel! I foresee a splendid future for you in the fields of fiction."

"Well, whatever the trouble is, she will get over it," I declared doggedly. "She is young, and no grief, however poignant, lasts more than a certain time; the nerves cannot keep up the strain. You know that yourself, Joan."

But Joan was not even listening to me; she was staring out of the window with an absent-minded gaze, and slowly stroking her chin with her right forefinger—an unmistakable symptom of profound thought. Presently she withdrew her eyes from space, and fastening them upon mine, said: "Rachel, do you know that you have introduced me to a most disagreeable idea?"

"With regard to Miss Rivers?"

"No, it is about Miss Bassett. She is one of a large family of girls; their mother is a clever intriguing little woman, and desperately anxious to get them married."

"No harm in that," I exclaimed.

"I now recall the fact," continued Joan, with a gravity that was almost tragic, "that I once heard her boast, that if given three wet days in a lively country-house, she could marry any one of her daughters; and when she called on me last March she talked about Norway the whole time, and said how much her dear Richard—that's the General—liked it, and how fashionable it had become! She declared that

half the smart people, and nearly *all* the eligible young men went there to fish, and that it must be a cheery, untrammelled, easy sort of life—no frocks or frock-coats, only tweeds and waders. She pumped me vigorously about the men in our valley—and I told her that Lord Scarcliff came every year to the fishing above us—how Toby Hopkins had again bespoke one of my rods, and that sometimes I was the only Englishwoman on the river. I could not imagine why she wanted all this information. Oh! I was a blind bat; now I see it all! She had the General down for Whitsuntide, and she has fished for an invitation for Dovey—as they call the best-looking of the girls. She is sending her to Norway with her poor, unsuspecting uncle, in order that she may angle for a big *parti*. I would never have dreamt of this but for *you*—you clever, wide-awake, society woman."

"We may both be wrong," I urged consolingly.

"Well, I sincerely hope so; time will tell. Pray imagine *me*, of all people, with two girls on my hands; the position is ridiculous! Talking of time, it is nearly six o'clock, and we must get to business. Here is a list of the sort of clothes you will require; bring as little luggage as possible. Carting up is so troublesome, and there is not one single wardrobe in the house. Bring plenty of books, pens, paper, and your pet patent medicine."

After some further discussion of ways and means,

and a solemn promise not to be late for the ten-thirty special at King's Cross, I took leave of Joan Valdy with the kiss of friendship.

Just as I was leaving the flat, she hurried after me, charged with the last word.

"Rachel! Listen! If anyone asks about our party—as, of course, they will—please don't tell them anything about Miss *Rivers*."

"How can I, when I know nothing of her?" I rejoined, and I could not help smiling at Joan's solemn face as I added, "I only wish I did!"

"Oh, pray do be serious!" she exclaimed impatiently. "When I took Mrs. Thoroughgood to the lift, she begged me most particularly to keep Miss Rivers's name and plans a secret. She does not wish there to be any 'talk,' and I have promised and vowed on your behalf, as well as my own."

"Then let me tell you, my anxious friend, that I would never have mentioned the subject, if you had not given me this warning. Now I know it will be always on the tip of my tongue to blurt out—'Miss Rivers is coming, Miss Rivers is coming; Miss Rivers will be on Mrs. Valdy's river!'"

I did not venture to wait for Joan's rejoinder to this impudent speech, but, stepping quickly into the lift, was wafted from her sight.

CHAPTER IV

ALL ABOARD

ALTHOUGH I was an early arrival at our rendezvous, King's Cross Station, when I appeared on the departure platform, with luggage and ticket, I found Joan already there, looking remarkably brisk and businesslike, in a Norwegian tweed suit—coat, skirt, and cap to match—with a courier's bag slung over her shoulder, and surrounded by a party. As soon as she had greeted me I was introduced to my fellow-guests in turn—first of all to Miss Bassett, a slight, picturesque-looking girl, with enormous grey eyes, brimming over with mirth, a wide but smiling mouth, remarkably white teeth, and quantities of rough mahogany-coloured hair. She wore a frieze costume of a brilliant lilac hue, and an air of the most infectious gaiety. Her uncle, General Bassett, was a short, well-set-up gentleman, with keen dark eyes, handsome aquiline features, and a black and white moustache. I realised at a glance that he was the sort of person who was likely to be prompt, energetic, alert, and what is generally understood by

the term "all there." Then Mr. Hopkins, a great, loose-limbed, vigorous young Briton, with thick features, ugly pale brown eyes, ugly pale brown hair, was also presented to me; he was distinctly plain, but looked reliable and stalwart—for brains and diplomacy, the little General; as a rescuer or defender, the civilian.

"We travel down in the Pullman dining-car," announced Joan, "and get an excellent lunch for half a crown. Our boat leaves Hull at six. I hope we shall have a good crossing."

At this moment our group was augmented by Mrs. Thoroughgood and, what I mentally called, "the girl."

"Mrs. Valdy," said the former, "here is my friend, Enid Rivers."

Miss Rivers, who was tall and slender, languidly extended a limp hand, and was subsequently made acquainted with her fellow-travellers. Her hair and eyes were almost black, her face so deathly white that the contrast was ghastly. Although her features were delicate and her air high-bred, I saw no trace of beauty in her haggard and colourless countenance, for the great dark eyes were hollow, the cheeks sunken, and the lips bloodless. Miss Rivers's manner was cold and reserved; when she had murmured a few words to Joan, she turned once more to her godmother, and they moved away.

"Rather an Imperial Highness!" whispered Miss

Bassett, addressing herself to me; "and I was so looking forward to being friends with her."

"And I hope you will be; I daresay she feels a little forlorn and shy among so many strangers."

"Then I wonder she comes. I must say I cannot imagine Miss Rivers fishing! She looks as if she was accustomed to wear a long velvet train and a tiara! Have you ever met her before? Do you know who she is?"

"No, I really do not," I replied, getting out of the way of a barrow; "but her friends are well known to Mrs. Valdy," and I promptly began to talk of the weather. Whilst we stood waiting the platform became every moment more crowded with a host of tweed-clad men and women. Porters were wheeling trucks laden with portmanteaus, bags, rod cases, and fishing-baskets—the unwieldy dress-trunk and the hat-case were conspicuous by their absence.

Most of the travellers gave Mrs. Valdy a friendly nod and a gay word—it was evidently not the first time that they had made this journey in company. Several smart ladies in muslin gowns and flowery hats had come to speed their relatives; there were not many women in the train, and these were of sterner stuff than the butterflies on the platform. No doubt, when the latter were flaunting their pretty frocks on racecourses or at garden-parties, their hardier sisters would be casting from boats, or wading waist deep in the rivers of a northern land.

By this time we had taken our places, the whistle gave a brisk toot, the green flag waved, the train began to move—there was a wild fluttering of many handkerchiefs, a shout of "Tight lines," and the boat express was away.

As we cleared the second tunnel Mrs. Valdy looked round her little party with a smile of complacence. She and Miss Bassett sat *vis-à-vis*. In the corresponding compartment were the General and Mr. Hopkins, already talking "fish." Miss Rivers occupied the seat opposite to mine, and I realised at once, and instinctively, that she did not wish to converse.

I also noted that she had an extravagant supply of papers and magazines and an expensive dressing-case, also that she was not in mourning; so that her sorrow was unconnected with a near relation.

By-and-by my companion retired completely behind the newspaper, and there remained for a couple of hours. I caught a glimpse of her once when I reached for a book, and noticed the rigidity of her attitude and that she was not reading, but staring stonily before her with an expression of profound despair.

At one o'clock there was a general bustle; lunch was ready, the cloth was laid, and Miss Rivers was compelled to put down her screen, but she absolutely refused to eat anything except a few biscuits; subsequently she offered me some magazines—possibly

with a view to preclude conversation—and devoted the remainder of the journey to gazing from the window. There was not much to enthrall her or anyone in the flat country which lies beyond Doncaster, yet her eyes never once wandered from the view. At last we discerned a forest of masts and the glimmer of the river; here was Hull—the first stage on our journey.

As we walked to the dock, Mrs. Valdy said, "I've just had a telegram from Mr. Clegg. The poor man has missed the train and boat, and will follow in a week. Well, it's an ill wind that blows nobody good—all the more fishing for the rest of us."

The *Dagmar*, a small steamer, was soon boarded; and scores of passengers, bound for Norway, were presently scattered over her decks.

We were two hours in getting out of the inner and outer docks, and these hours of peace gave people time to arrange their cabins, secure places at table, and take stock of their fellow-travellers. There were about seventy first-class passengers, and a large number of Norwegian emigrants returning from England or America.

"Come and choose your seat at table," said Joan, as she met me on the companion-ladder.

"Perhaps I may never require it," I rejoined, nevertheless following her down to the saloon; "I believe it is going to be a lively crossing—did you see how all the flags were being whisked about?"

"Never meet trouble half-way," she replied. "Now where shall we sit?"

The tables were already laid, and tastefully arranged with flowers and dessert. Standing surveying them were two ladies—a short little person with no neck, wearing a sable-lined coat and a yachting cap, and a faded individual with canary-coloured hair, arrayed in a silk and lace travelling cloak, elaborate as a tea-gown, a gold and black toque, feather boa, and white kid gloves. (I saw Joan gazing at her with an expression of sorrowful compassion.) She was staring about her with a long-handled eyeglass.

"My dear Lady Guise," she exclaimed, "I leave it to you! If I am near *you*, it is all the same to *me* where I sit."

"Well, I don't think it matters, so long as we don't find ourselves planted among the paying guests who are on board."

Joan, who had moved over and put down her cards, looked up at me and smiled significantly.

"Yes, fancy such people in Norway, of all places! How *can* they afford it?"

"Oh, London tradespeople can afford a good deal," replied Lady Guise. "My dressmaker has sent her son to Oxford. Come along, this is the captain's table, he's always well served. We will settle down here."

"The new people for the fishing at the mouth of our river," explained Joan, as we gained the deck.

"Lady Guise and friend—one would suppose the friend was going to Ascot. There is Sir Robert, the thin man with a large nose, and the freckled girl is his daughter. Dear me, what a noise she is making! Those two young men are also of the party; the maids and footmen and bicycles belong to the same contingent. Well, we shall not see much of *them*, that is certain."

As we sat on deck the *Dagmar* slowly edged her way from bridge to bridge. Miss Bassett came and established herself beside me; her gay grey eyes were busy as she took in the surrounding scene.

"What crowds of fishing people!" she exclaimed. "I've never seen so many men together. I've counted no less than forty-seven."

Yes; walking to and fro, or standing in animated groups, were a number of well-looking, well-set-up English gentlemen, of ages varying from one-and-twenty to seventy. There seemed to be a kind of freemasonry among them, and they were more or less well acquainted. You heard—

"Hullo, Lambert! So here we are again! Where are you for this year—the Nansen or the Orkla?"

"I say, what sport had you fellows last season? Greville tells me he's taken that fishing at Sande after all."

The surrounding conversation was solely of fish and flies; standing just beside us, two men were carrying on an animated argument respecting the

superior merits of a "Jock Scott" and a "Black Jay"; in another group a fisher was relating an exciting experience with violent gesticulation, and I actually heard him say, "I tell you, sir, he broke the water, and came at me like a tiger!"

Mrs. Valdy might receive paying guests, but she was evidently a well-known and popular woman; a person of considerable importance in the fishing world. The captain welcomed her warmly; half the passengers were her friends. I watched her gravely conferring with the General and two hardy-looking sportsmen, and to judge by their faces the fate of a kingdom might have been trembling in the balance. The fact was they were debating the momentous question of netting and nets.

The buzz of conversation was sustained by the absorbing topic of flies, the weight of fish, and whether fresh run, grilse, or kelts. I had been accustomed to mix with authorities on the subject of tennis, golf, and hunting, but had never yet associated with the great fishing set, and in point of whole-souled, undivided passion for that pursuit, they left all the others—like Eclipse—nowhere!

"Ever been to Norway before, Miss Bosworth?" suddenly inquired General Bassett.

"No."

"Fish—eh?"

I shook my head, and then added, "I fancy I am the sole exception on board."

He looked about with his piercing black eyes and replied, "I shouldn't be surprised if you were. All these"—glancing from group to group—"are regulars, like myself, and wonderfully keen; we meet like this every season, and scatter to our favourite haunts. You see that old gentleman over there in the ulster—Mr. Brandon—this is his thirtieth season; it is the strange, indescribable attraction of the North, which, if a man once feels, will never leave him. I have been across eleven times."

"But not always to the same fishing?"

"No; but I beg to state that I am now a fixture on the Rande River—I've never had better sport. And Mrs. Valdy makes everyone comfortable—so different to taking a lodge with another man, and trying to house-keep, and living in misery and want. At least, that was *my* fate. Half the pleasure of our sport, was discounted by short commons; I assure you I've known what is meant by the pangs of hunger. Now, with Mrs. Valdy, we fare luxuriously without a thought to the larder. She has a wonderful head for organisation, and would have been a magnificent commissariat officer. She makes one feel thoroughly at home."

"I am confident of that," I replied; "she and I are old friends."

"This year I am bringing my niece as an experiment, and intend to make her a good fisherwoman—her mother was anxious she should see Norway. I

wonder how you will put in your time—what you will do."

"I am an abominably idle person. I shall be content to do nothing—I shall look on."

"Ah!" with a quick glance, "and cultivate an ornamental leisure! I don't fancy you will see much to interest you. We eat, and sleep, and fish—fish, sleep, and eat."

"Then I suppose I shall merely sleep and eat."

Whilst the General and I were making acquaintance with one another his niece and Mr. Hopkins were pacing the deck. She was talking and laughing with extraordinary animation; her eyes danced and her white teeth gleamed, but I noticed that he was quiet, and what I might term "guarded" in his manner. I also noted the unusual size of his boots, and for the first time realised what was conveyed by the expression "covering the ground."

Presently my companion was accosted by a big bearded man, who said, "I say, General, come and sit next me at table, will you? I want to talk to you about the Orkla—such a grand river it would be if we could get the nets off."

The bell was ringing as he spoke, and leaving the two enthusiasts together, I descended to my cabin to make a *demi-toilette.* Just as I had fastened the last hook Joan entered in a smart white silk blouse.

"You've not seen anything of Miss Rivers, have you?"

"No, I think she is lying down—fancy, *already!* and we are not out of the Humber; they say we shall catch it off the Spurn—a dead north-easter."

"If I am laid low, Rachel, and I make no pretensions to being waterproof, will you—a seasoned sailor—look after that girl, and take her under your wing?"

"Yes, with pleasure, if she will come!"

"How are you getting on so far?"

"Capitally, thank you; I only wish I had read up the subject of salmon. I suppose you haven't such a thing as a treatise on flies, casts, netting, and so on, you can lend me?"

"Don't be silly," she protested; "I can lend you a book on the Norwegian language—you can study that; now, come along! The captain—an old friend—has insisted on our sitting at his table, and has actually moved the Guise party—they are furious!"

After dinner—where the fish, a most excellent salmon, gave rise to a heated argument as to its nationality, and whether Scotch, Irish, or Norwegian, whether lately landed or kept on ice, its possible weight and age—the wind freshened; we had plunged into the unpopular North Sea, and people sought their berths. There were many empty seats at breakfast and lunch the next day. Shortly before dinner I went and knocked at No. 22 cabin, and said, "How are you getting on, Miss Rivers? Will you not come and dine?"

"No, thank you, I do not want anything."

"Not oranges, or eau de Cologne? Do have some Bovril," I urged.

"No—no, thanks!"—there was a querulous weariness and impatience in the tone that drove me away, and I retreated almost into the arms of the stewardess.

"Has she been very ill?" I inquired, pointing to cabin 22.

"Ill? Bless you, no, ma'am! Only ill in her mind, poor dear! She cries 'most all the time. Her friends did not ought to leave her to herself, and so *I*—say!"

This was true, and before turning in I ventured to open the door of 22 unannounced. Miss Rivers was fast asleep, as if utterly exhausted. I held my breath, as I gazed at the delicate emaciated face, the long black lashes, the masses of hair, and the wonderful turn of throat and neck. One hand lay under her head, the other grasped a letter—an open letter. No doubt that sheet of paper held her secret! I crept out on tiptoe, and gently closed the door.

CHAPTER V

THE MAN AT BERGEN

AT eight o'clock in the morning the stately coast of Norway rose steadily in view—there was still a heavy swell and a distinctly disagreeable up-and-down motion, but the sun shone—though the sky was a cold cloudless blue, and there was an invigorating flavour in the sharp, salt air.

Determined to take no refusal or snub, I went below, knocked, and entered the cabin of the "sham" seasick lady. She was dressed all but her gown, and lying on her berth in a loose white wrapper.

"Now look here," I began brusquely, "I have brought you a nice cup of hot tea, and some bread and butter!"

"Oh, I don't want anything," she protested peevishly.

"I daresay not! Young people don't know what is good for them; you have to swallow this!" and I stood over her as if I were a nurse prescribing for a patient, whilst she took a few sips with childlike docility.

"Now the bread and butter—every crumb!"

This she also disposed of, with agreeable obedience. No doubt the poor girl was faint from fasting.

"Next thing, you must dress and come up on deck with me," I resumed. "It is a lovely morning, and we are getting in close to the coast of Norway. I feel sure you want to see it."

"No, no!" she answered, rising to her feet, and speaking with sudden resolution; "I shall stay below —I don't want to see anything—or anybody—I'm not coming out at all!"

"Do you mean that you will go backwards and forwards across the North Sea a perpetual passenger?" I laughed. "Come, I know you have some trouble on your mind," I added, laying my hand on her arm. "My dear girl, we have *all* had our sorrows. I had one that I thought would have killed me, but here I am still, ready to make the very best of things, and you must do the same. If you give yourself up to a grief, which may ruin your health, your looks——"

"Oh, my looks!" she interrupted, with indescribable scorn.

"Well, your life—and can surely benefit no one—my dear; for the sake of your mother——"

"I have no mother," she said stiffly.

"Well, whoever cares for you most in the world; won't you try and keep your thoughts a little off your grief, and give yourself a chance—come, now?"

"But I can't bear to go among people!" she exclaimed; "they will be all staring and whispering and pointing at me, and it was not *my* fault—oh, God knows—it was not my fault!" and she wrung her hands distractedly, flung herself face downwards in her berth, and gave way to a fit of subdued sobbing.

"Now, listen!" I said, affecting a stolid indifference; "I'll return for you in exactly five minutes. Put on your dress, a warm coat and hat, and shoes—I think I can find a nice little sheltered nook near the second-class deck where no one comes. I'll get chairs and rugs there, and then you and I will 'picnic' together. Come, promise; otherwise, I warn you that I shall take up my abode *here*—there is a threat!"

She sat up, gave a funny little hysterical laugh, and said, "I can't think *why* you are so good to me?"

"Not at all, I only want you to be good to yourself. Now, remember," I said, with my hand on the door, "I give you exactly five minutes."

Within ten we were comfortably established in a secluded spot, which was really on the second-class deck. My captive wore an expensive, long, sable-lined coat and a travelling-cap (money no object), and I saw a faint light dawn in her eyes as they lit upon the scene we were rapidly approaching.

Along the stern, rock-bound coast, where the sea beat high and the white gulls whirled, were emerald green patches and occasional red wooden houses.

A number of Norwegian emigrants—chiefly middle-aged or elderly men—had crowded to the side, and were gazing upon their native land with looks of pathetic affection; indeed, some of their furrowed faces were wet with tears. I noticed that there were but few women among them, and I was informed that they were chiefly emigrants returning from America. As Stavanger came into view, and we rounded the point and steamed into the land-locked fjord, with one accord, as if stirred by a common impulse, they suddenly began to sing an old Norse song, possibly the chant of some victorious Viking returning from pillaging the coasts of Britain. It was a weird, heart-stirring air that the crowd sang so lustily; they had fine voices among them, and I can give no just idea of the dramatic effect, as her eager children acclaimed their stern but beloved mother-land. The song had an excellent result on my unhappy companion, for it appeared to rouse her from her condition of mental stupor.

"How delightful!" she murmured. "What wild, wild singing. I love them for welcoming the first town of their own shores."

One of the emigrants, a respectable-looking man of about forty, had evidently noticed our interest, and when the song ceased he approached, and said, "You see, we are all glad because we come home; our country is poor, but we love her."

"Have you been long away?" I inquired.

"Fifteen years; but you see that old man in the brown coat?"

I nodded. I had already noticed a white-bearded patriarch pacing restlessly from end to end of the deck, and moving among the first-class passengers—his hard, wrinkled old face animated by some overpowering emotion.

"Bergen is his town. He has been away for forty years, and now he comes back to die in his own land. Here he is!"

As he approached I observed that the brown overcoat was open, and displayed a broad gold watch-chain. Presumably the old emigrant had prospered.

"Do you land at Stavanger?" I asked. "And you have not been back for fifteen years. How glad your people must be?"

"They don't know I am coming. No, that is so."

"Did you not write?"

"Not lately; I write but once or twice a year. I had a chance to come cheaply and a little spare money, and so I came a quick journey. I live 1,600 miles from New York; from New York I came to Southampton, and then to Hull and here—all in two weeks and three days. Cheap fares and food quite good."

"Then you will return to America, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes; I am married and have eight children! And I have a good farm in Minnesota—two hundred

acres—and sheep, cattle, and hogs. My son, who is seventeen, and my wife, they look after it. I can only stay one month, for I must be home for the harvest."

"Do your people live near Stavanger?"

"Oh yes, quite close; about three miles. I shall wash and brush up at a friend's house and walk home. I expect to be there to dinner."

"Do you like America?" I inquired.

"Oh yes—it is all good land, where one can live. Here there is no food, no matter how hard we work. Our country is very poor. Look!" pointing to the desolate shores, so stern and barren; "no grass for cattle, only fishing, and that is a trade that costs lives. All the same, Norway is my own country and I love her."

When the steamer was moored alongside the jetty, and Miss Rivers and I were standing together looking at the novel scene, the curious wooden houses, the stout, well-fed ponies in carioles and carts, and watching the bustle of departing fisher-folk, bound south, the emigrant came to say good-bye.

"Now I go," he announced brusquely, as he extended his horny palm.

"Good-bye," I replied, "I hope you will find all well at home."

"Good-bye," he echoed, shaking my hand very warmly, and then seizing on Miss Rivers's and

wringing her delicate fingers. "I hope you will both enjoy your stay in my country, and be very happy here."

As we watched him hurrying down the gangway, carrying a carpet-bag and box, I turned to my companion and said, "Well, at least we have had a warm welcome to Norway."

She nodded, and smiled for once—such a charming smile.

"Don't you think it strange that he should not let his people know of his plans?"

For a moment she made no reply, and then said, looking down on the deck, "No, I rather sympathise with him! Sometimes it is better to keep one's movements to one's self; it does away with expectation and disappointment."

Our party, and almost all the passengers, had landed in order to stroll about Stavanger, explore the quaint cathedral, and live-fish market, while our cargo was being unloaded; but we two recluses remained on board, and I believe this fact went far to cement our acquaintance.

From Stavanger the *Dagmar* threaded her course between steep, rocky islands and sharp promontories, dotted with wooden houses, resembling the toy ones belonging to the sheepfolds of our youth, with trees to correspond, and where the sheep found a precarious living. We steamed up great fjords, passing many fishing-smacks, whose picturesque orange or

red sails made a patch of colour against the stern grey cliffs which arm the coast of Norway.

The scenery was wild, almost tragic; the further north we went, the wilder and sterner it became, and towards evening, but still in broad daylight, we steamed up the gleaming fjord to the beautiful old Hanse town of Bergen.

Here was endless shipping, crowds of buildings and gabled houses, all huddled together around a harbour, at the foot of two picturesque mountains.

Everyone was going ashore, and, after considerable difficulty, I persuaded my protégée to accompany me. She was already better, and even exhibited a languid interest in various foreign sights. We followed slowly in the wake of our own party along the principal streets, and went into several curio shops.

I was anxious to buy some souvenirs in the shape of carvings, painted or otherwise. The shops were kept open, though the hour was ten o'clock, for several steamers were in, and it was broad daylight. In one large establishment we climbed a break-neck stair, and discovered quite a labyrinth of departments. Here were furs, china, carvings, stuffs, and picture-cards. To this last section I promptly repaired. The place was thronged; people stood at the counter three deep; everyone seemed to clamour for picture post-cards. We had to wait a long time before we could find seats and get served. Then, as

Miss Rivers and I were turning over an album and making a choice selection, I suddenly felt a tight grip on my wrist, and my companion said in a tremulous whisper, "I am going. Please don't mind me; I'll find my way back alone." Her eyes as they met mine expressed desperation and fear.

I instantly struggled out of the crush and joined her in a dark nook, into which she dragged me by main force as a man passed us quickly—a tall young man, who ran lightly downstairs.

"What is the matter?" I inquired in a whisper.

"He—was—choosing cards," she gasped. "Oh, I hope he did not recognise me. I would not have *him* see me for the whole world!"

"Well, he cannot possibly see you, since he has disappeared below," I said soothingly. "I will just go back and get my parcels and pay for the cards, and then, if you like, we will return to the steamer."

"By a back street!" she urged hysterically.

"By two back streets, if you please."

She was still trembling, when I rejoined her, and as we stepped out quickly together she said, "Oh, what must you think of me? But I am shaking all over; that man's face recalled something." She stopped, shuddered, and put her hands over her eyes.

"Come, come," I said heartlessly, "you are not likely to see him again; and do look down on Bergen and all the queer steep streets, with the

masts at the bottom of them, the harbour and hills beyond. It is a shame not to notice such a view."

"Yes. He must have come in one of the other steamers," was her sole response as she stood and gazed down at the old town with an air of grave abstraction.

"You are wonderful, Rachel," declared Mrs. Valdy as she sat in my cabin that same night; "you have entirely given yourself up to that miserable child, and retired into her seclusion, taking your meals on deck and all. I was asked if you were her companion."

"I am, and I like it; far from the giddy, or rather fishy, throng. How are they all getting on?"

"Well, 'Dovey' and young Hopkins seem to sit together a good deal, but I gather that he cannot *talk*—in fact, I know he has no conversation beyond flies. However, she is a great chatterbox, and has tremendous spirits. General Bassett has found an old comrade, and also a man who has revealed to him the make-up of a certain stuff for keeping lines from rotting, and he is happy—so happy!"

"Anything else?"

"Yes. I have made an enemy and also a friend! Lady Guise and I have had a difference about our turn for the bath. I waited ages with my sponge and towels, and went for a second to look at a passing steamer. During this second the bather emerged, and Lady Guise came along, threw my property

aside, dashed in, and remained three-quarters of an hour! I felt it my duty to let her see that I was not pleased."

"And the acquaintance?"

"I don't know if you have noticed a handsome, fair woman travelling alone; she has a square, resolute sort of face and a pair of fine granite-blue eyes, speaks with a strange mixture of a foreign accent and an American twang, rather well dressed —but wears too much jewellery."

I nodded. "A woman who talks of 'going for a horseback ride,' and sits at our table."

"Yes, my *vis-à-vis*, and she has evidently taken a fancy to me. Our acquaintance, which began with the butter, has advanced by leaps and bounds—I don't really know *where* it will end—and she asked if she might join our party at Bergen, as she was alone. Of course, I could not decline, and so I took the lady under my wing, and introduced her to the General. Her name is Slogger. Her husband is an American, and she is Norwegian, and has come over to visit her people. I cannot make out her exact destination, but she is going north. She has all the American self-reliance and *aplomb*.

"I invited her to supper at the hotel; of course, I could not leave her out; while you, you poor martyr, returned to the steamer, to sup on a ship's biscuit. I do hope that girl will not insist on always hiding herself in Randval, and having her meals alone."

"I think not; she seems better already. I believe I shall produce her at breakfast to-morrow!"

"Well, mind you do, for we get to Eilon at twelve o'clock, and as soon as possible start off in a little steamer I have ordered to take us up the fjord."

The next morning was Sunday, and at twelve o'clock we ran alongside a jetty, which was so crowded that there seemed no possible standing-room for one other person. The general effect of the throng was that of a multitude in mourning—a melancholy contrast to the gay, picturesque foreign spectacle I had hoped to see.

Visions of scarlet and gold, of ornamental crowns and silver crosses, were instantly dispersed. The men wore dark or black suits and black flat caps. The women were attired to correspond, with white aprons and handkerchiefs tied over their heads. (The mental characteristics of a nation have no small influence on its costume.) Blue were the eyes uplifted to our deck, and the faces we looked down upon were intelligent, stern, and serious. It was the countenance of a grave, self-respecting people, who lacked both sun and joy—a people who were compelled to wrest with a fierce struggle, their bread from a beautiful, but cruel motherland. The hard outdoor life, timber-cutting and sea-fishing, the hours spent in darkness and patience, had left their mark upon the multitude.

At first I thought the solemn assemblage signified

the reception of some high official who was on board, but I soon learned that it was the custom on Sunday for the entire population of Eilon to meet the English mail—there was nothing else to do!

"Are you ready?" said Mrs. Valdy; "there is our boat," indicating a small green launch, "and I'm glad to see they have the steam up."

There was a sense of novel, delicious importance in having a whole steamer for one party — our steamer! our own special steamer! The term "reserved carriage," or even "private cabin," sounded mean in comparison.

I noticed the Guise gathering, a large one, travelling with much pomp and circumstance. I counted twelve descending the gangway, followed by a quantity of baggage.

Presently among the silent, grave-eyed throng there arose the sound of loud and angry voices in a foreign tongue. A terrible quarrel was in full progress. Two of the local agents were fighting for the one steam launch—*our* steam launch! The Guises had omitted to order this very necessary means of transport, and had offered their agent any sum to obtain it. Their agent was now engaged in browbeating and bullying his rival, whilst a breathless crowd, delighted with this unexpected excitement, stood round in a charmed circle. To obtain the steamer meant much to the Guises' agent—not only a reward of 100 kroners, but a magnificent moral

victory. Henceforth his status would be supreme in Eilon. Lady Guise was accustomed to get whatever she was prepared to *pay* for; she was ready to pay for the green launch! anything sooner than spend the night in the local hotel—anything sooner than that the abominable party of "paying guests" should carry the day in triumph! At last the Guise agent approached Mrs. Valdy, and had the extraordinary hardihood to make her an offer—in Norwegian. I believe it was couched in these terms: "Surely she was a kind and much-respected lady; she had only five people, besides herself and one servant; could she not oblige, if her hotel bill was paid for?"

"No, she was quite unable to oblige," she answered sternly; "kind as she was, she could not disarrange her plans, or expect her friends to lose a day's fishing."

Subsequently the battle was resumed with redoubled fury, while our baggage was carried on board, and then we had all to run the gauntlet of the enemy, who were drawn up in a long row, beginning with her ladyship, and ending with the under-footman.

Lady Guise said something about "Noah's ark," and tittered loudly, and the yellow-haired woman glared at us through her long glasses, but we did not care a straw.

Those laugh who win! We proceeded to march in stately single file aboard the little green packet,

which in a short time had puffed itself off, leaving the multitude gazing at us, motionless and, let us hope, impressed. General Bassett, his niece, and Joan, and, in fact, all of us, mounted to the deck, from whence we had a capital view of the pier as we sped across the harbour. Before our steamer rounded a corner and was lost to view, "Dovey" was so carried away by youth and excitement that she was guilty of an action which annoyed her uncle extremely, I say nothing of the feelings of Joan!

Certainly it was agreeable to triumph, and carry off the prize—one's own special launch—in the teeth of envious competitors; but it was another matter for one of her party to wave the handkerchief of exultation at that long line of lightly coloured figures, who were thrown into sharp relief by the background of a dark crowd.

General Bassett snatched the mischievous cambric from his niece's hand—too late, the signal had been seen! In another moment the steamer had squattered out into the great fjord, and become to the spectators lost to sight, if not to memory dear.

CHAPTER VI

ON THE GREEN STEAM LAUNCH

THE great Kilde Fjord, up which we steamed, was a vast arm of the sea; on either side steep hills rose precipitately from the shores—these were covered with dense forests and scored with silver waterfalls. Now and then in a bay we passed a bit of low-lying pasture, with red farmhouses, high barns, and a little wooden pier, with boats moored close by. The beauty and dignity of the scenery was impressive; the sunlight, the air, the vividness of each hue—green, silver, and purple—were a delight to eyes accustomed to the murk and smoke of a city. We seemed to be passing through a silent land, far apart from our noisy bustling world; the solemn stillness crept into one's mind and whispered peace. Possibly the same idea had occurred to Miss Rivers, for she sat apart, with an expression of exaltation on her pale, sad face.

Talkative Miss Bassett was temporarily silent. I believe she was painfully conscious of the fact that for once her high spirits had run away with her.

General Bassett kindly undertook to do the honours of the fjord to me. He pointed out various particular objects, such as the mouths of rivers and the tongues of land; also the great black fish which were to be seen occasionally rolling in our wake.

"A sure sign," he explained, "that the salmon are up. There is a shoal of fish running—they are after them. There you see the nets, all along the shore," he added, pointing to certain stakes; "they are over the mouth of the Rande, and only removed for two days a week."

"What splendid scenery!" I exclaimed. "How grave and grand it is!"

"Oh, yes; I suppose so," glancing indifferently at the steep, snow-capped hills and the gleaming cascades. "But I come here for salmon, not scenery, and I beg you will not praise the neighbourhood in your letters, for if this inland country gets a reputation we shall be overrun with tourists—we shall have a railway, and there will be an end to our sport! So far the tripper is satisfied with the midnight sun, and at the coast I sincerely hope he will remain."

Our journey occupied several hours, hours of truly delightful idleness. We talked a little, looked about us a great deal, and enjoyed an excellent cold lunch. Not long after we had despatched it, Joan drew me aside and said—

"We shall soon come to our own river and landing-stage, and find carioles and people waiting. The

General always drives me up—he considers it his exclusive right—otherwise I would go in the *stolkjærre* with you, and point out places. The first big white house you will notice is the lower fishing—the Guises'. After six or seven miles you come to a village and church across the Rande, that is the 'Tor' fishing; and when you see a bend in the river and a red flag floating above the trees, you will know you are close to Randval."

"All right," I replied, "I will remember."

"And another thing. Do not be surprised if everyone I present to you—our fishermen and servants—immediately shake you by the hand; it is the custom in this country—we are all on an equality, there are no classes or masses, there are no squires or nobility. The farmer living in a log-house, minding his dairy and wood-cutting, is a gentleman. He has been on that spot for centuries, and is one of the lords of the soil. The carpenter who carves, the man who rows your boat, has possibly a pedigree that goes back to Harold Harfaager. Most of the wealthier farmers keep servants for milking and weaving, but they sit at the same table, and address them without ceremony. And here we are," she added, pointing to a little pier, on which I noticed a group of black figures. "Oscar has come as usual to welcome us—he is the big man in the valley, agent for the fishings, and my near neighbour. I see he has brought a train of vehicles."

As soon as I set foot on shore Joan formally presented me to Oscar "as an old friend come to see Norway."

He was a sturdy, middle-aged, upright man, with a square, clean-shaven, intelligent face, who shook me cordially by the hand and said: "Glad to see you. Hope you will like my country."

With surprisingly short delay we were sorted into conveyances, each drawn by a stout pony. In the first sat Joan and the General; next came Miss Rivers in a cariole, driving herself, whilst the *skydsgut** (pony boy) sat behind. Miss Bassett and I followed in a *stolkjærre* (a little gig for two), and the rear was brought up by Oscar and Mr. Hopkins, who were evidently old friends.

The drive along the bank of the river proved delightful: it was still spring in Norway; the birds in the trees and bushes sang unrestrainedly, and there was a fragrant scent of fresh clover, elder flowers, and cherry blossom. The unfenced road was excellent, and wound like an avenue through the short grass. There were no landmarks whatever, but here and there a painted red post was inscribed with the name of the owner of the property, who was bound to keep the highway in order as far as it lay through his land, a rule that appeared to work remarkably well. On the left hand was the river, wide and clear, and running with a pleasant tinkle;

* Pronounced "shüsgoot."

beyond it were farms, standing apart, and without the accustomed surroundings of green gardens and fields—merely big two-storied houses with a roof covered with moss and grass, a huge barn with a cattle-shed beneath, and a deep primitive draw-well, that was all. The houses were large and comfortable, with plants in the windows, and frequently painted a bright red. When we passed close to them the cattle and pigs struck me as unnaturally tame, yet I saw no poultry and scarcely one dog. We drove up and down swelling hills, over rough wooden bridges, and through a delicious pine forest, cool and fragrant—only wanting the sunlight to be perfect. I was so deeply interested that I proved but a dull companion to Miss Bassett, who suddenly broke the silence by saying, "I should like to know what *you* think of Miss Rivers? Mr. Hopkins calls her plain, Uncle Richard says she is strikingly beautiful, but then we all suspect that he was once in love with a Spanish lady who died—he admires anyone who is dark—he is no judge!"

"What is your own opinion?" I inquired.

"Oh, I suppose, honestly speaking, she is good-looking, with her wonderful eyes and scornful little mouth, but she is too cadaverous—she gives me the idea of being haunted or pursued by something."

"Ah, I see you have imagination," I responded. "Mrs. Valdy finds that I have the same gift. If time

hangs *quite* too heavily, you and I must write a novel."

"Now, Miss Bosworth!" and she coloured, "you laugh at me, and, indeed, at most people, in your sleeve. Do you think Miss Rivers handsome?"

"Certainly not now. She is in bad health, and seems unhappy. It is not fair to judge at present."

"But you and she are great friends! She freezes me; and Mr. Hopkins, he calls her 'Below Zero.' *He* does not admire her."

"No. He prefers a fair type," I suggested ironically.

"Yes—so he says. Wasn't it fun about those people being left in the lurch? Uncle Richard was frightfully angry with me. He never says much, but he has a way of letting you know. I did enjoy waving at them as they stood gaping after us—odious, stuck-up creatures! What do you think?"

"I am sorry to say that I agree with your uncle—that handkerchief of yours entirely discounted the dignity of our departure. It's rather a pity we should be unfriendly, for by all accounts the neighbourhood is small."

"I wonder if there will be any tennis parties or dances? Anyhow, there are plenty of men."

"I'm sure such a thing as tennis is unknown, but I believe the country people dance in their barns."

"Oh! and I've two such smart ball-gowns. I asked her"—nodding towards Miss Rivers—"how

many evening dresses she brought out, and she just stared as if she thought I was an idiot!"

"I'm afraid you must make up your mind to a quiet existence—fishing the only excitement."

"Yes, of course I shall fish. Uncle Dick is to teach me, and Mr. Hopkins has promised to let me go out with him sometimes. He seems good-natured, and he and Uncle Dick are such pals."

Conversation languished, for I was not in a talking humour, I preferred to exercise my eyes; every now and then some turn of the road opened a fresh vista of cascades pouring down through the woods, or wide, fern-fringed, running streams, a bold outline of mountains, or an ancient, picturesque abode of logs, that seemed to cry aloud, "Come and sketch me!"

At last, above some trees, by a bend in the Rande, a white mast and streaming Union Jack came in sight; then our cavalcade thundered over a little wooden bridge and drew up on the green grass beside the verandah of Randval House.

It was a long, red, two-storied residence, sheltered at one end by cherry trees. The roof was picturesquely covered with moss and quantities of ox-eyed daisies. Close by was an ancient well, a huge barn and storehouse, humorously decorated with rude wooden models of gigantic salmon.

The servants flocked out to greet us, and they and the boatmen clustered round Mrs. Valdy and hailed her with friendly warmth. No doubt they would

have detained her talking to them for hours; but she curtailed the conversation, being resolved to lose no time in conducting us into the house and up the steep stairs to our several apartments. They were all of the same description—bright and beautifully clean, the walls and ceiling of wood, a square of carpet on the spotless boards. A bed, a bath, a chest of drawers, and washing-table comprised the furniture. Randval House was situated in the middle of the valley; the prospect was perfect as I opened my window, leant out, surveyed the shining river, which ran over its stones within two hundred yards, and gazed at the steep, wooded hills, which rose from the opposite shore, and the thick green grass, speckled with wild flowers, that lay between the lodge and the water.

As I stood, I heard the note of the cuckoo and the clink of a cow-bell in the forest, and drew a long breath as I said to myself, "Oh, I am *glad* I came."

A loud booming of a gong summoned us to supper, and we flocked down to the dining-room, and were soon seated at a round table decorated with vases of wild roses and laden with an excellent repast—salmon, cold cutlets, ham, stewed fruit, rice, thick cream, and wonderful butter and cheese.

As we were all ravenously hungry, at first the meal proceeded in greedy silence. Presently Mr. Hopkins exclaimed at the sight of a familiar beer-jug, and General Bassett inquired for his own special carving-

knife. Apparently these two were happily at home. The dining-room was large, and was composed of enormous logs, painted red. In one corner was a great open fireplace; the furniture was simple—a writing-table, some painted presses and cupboards, and a few armchairs. It looked out both back and front—in the front into the verandah and approach, at the back into a railed-in garden.

"Oscar tells me that the river is in capital order," remarked the General. "I've half a mind to go up to the new pool, and try my luck to-night!"

"No, no, General," expostulated Mr. Hopkins. "Play the game! Begin to-morrow, and we will all start fair. Besides, we must draw up the "roster" of our turns—five beats, and we take them in turn from the top. There is Mrs. Valdy, you and Miss Bassett, Miss Rivers three, myself four, and Mr. Clegg, when he comes, five. What shall we do about his piece of water? Toss for it?"

"No, no! Divide the fishing into four till this day week," said General Bassett. "Are you *very* keen, Miss Rivers? Done much fishing?"

"Yes, some time ago I used to fish in Scotland, but I am quite out of practice now."

"Oscar tells me that the people who have taken Tor arrived a week ago—a young couple and a friend. Their name is Dering," announced Joan.

"Dering?" said the General. "There was a Dering in the Guards with heaps of money. He married

and left the service. I wonder if it would be the same?"

"Have they had any sport?" inquired Hopkins.

"I don't know for certain. Oscar said something about fifteen fish. I'll ask him to inquire at the telephone."

"The telephone is in his house," said Mrs. Valdy, turning to explain, "and connects the entire valley with—I may say, Norway. We telephone for what we want to Trondhjem or Christiania, and, besides this, we can always inquire from our neighbours what they are catching, and so on."

"Each big fish that is landed is reported in every farmhouse in the valley," added the General.

"Fancy gossiping through the telephone!" I exclaimed.

"You may laugh, but it is invaluable when there is no rail and no telegraph. Now, ladies," she added, rising and opening a door, "here you see the drawing-room. Pray make yourselves at home. I have to look after my housekeeping. Breakfast is at 8.30, and *stolkjærres* to take people up to the two far beats will be ready soon after nine."

The drawing-room gave one the impression of being all windows (like a greenhouse)—there were six. It stood at the end of the house, and had three outside walls. These walls were of bare boards covered with sporting prints and groups. There was a huge open fireplace, a few Indian rugs on the floor,

cretonne curtains, a great Norwegian wedding chest, a painted cupboard, three writing-tables, a number of basket chairs, and some Norwegian ones in old stamped leather. Several stuffed birds were perched precariously on brackets—capercailzie, gulls, and duck. Add to this a bookcase full of miscellaneous books, brought and left by guests, and the sketch of the drawing-room is complete. It was a room to which everyone in due time became deeply attached.

Mr. Hopkins and the General followed us, with an air of solemn importance. Together they drew up a large sheet of paper and fastened it to the wall. The document professed to set forth, day by day, the take and weight of fish, the pool, and name of angler. When this semi-official arrangement was concluded, they sat down at writing-tables, and began to consult two fishing diaries, and look over, and discuss, past entries and past triumphs.

"I wonder if we shall have as good a season as last year?" said the General. "By Jove! do you remember that twenty-eight pounder I got in Sladgen, and on a 'green highlander' and the river in flood?"

"A 'green highlander'? I thought it was a 'thunder and lightning'! There was that thirty-pounder that I nearly lost in Oolar. By George! what a fight I had! he was lightly hooked! and a wild, fresh-run salmon is a tough customer."

During their animated reminiscences, each reading out scraps in turn, they never noticed my departure.

I went up to my nice, cheery little room at ten o'clock in broad daylight. Before I retired, I knocked at the door of my neighbour, Miss Dovey Bassett. She was on her knees unpacking, and I beheld a pile of billowy-looking muslins scattered over the bed and floor—foulards, chiffons, and furbelows.

"My dear girl!" I exclaimed, "you will never want these. Do you know the usual fisherwoman's costume on a salmon river?"

She looked up eagerly. "Do tell me!"

"A pair of what are called waders, long boots reaching far above the knee, and a short waterproof jacket."

"Oh! How awful!"

"Awful, but business-like. Don't unpack any more, but go to your bye-bye."

Then I went and knocked at Miss Rivers's door, and entered, without waiting for the usual "Come in!"

She was standing in the window staring out, with her hands clasped behind her, a very slim, graceful figure. As she turned her face to mine, I discerned that it was wet with tears.

"Come, come," I expostulated, "this will never do! Why are you not in bed?"

"Because I am afraid to go to bed," she answered, with a little shiver. "I—dream—— Oh, how I *dream!*"

"You will not dream to-night, you are dead tired,

and when you have been here a few days you will be a different girl, and not afraid of dreams."

"Oh, if I could only think so, Miss Bosworth!" and she gazed at me with such an expression of misery in her hopeless eyes that I drew her near to me, and kissed her, and said—

"You and I will fight your phantoms together. Good-night!"

I closed the door and lost no time in seeking my nice little brass bedstead, where, almost immediately, I fell fast asleep, with the soothing sound of the river in my ears. Thus ended my first day in Norway.

CHAPTER VII

THE FIRST FISH

AS I sat on the steps of the *stoep* the next morning, I noticed that the verandah was already hung with waterproofs and waders; landing-nets and gaffs stood in corners, and beneath its eaves were suspended several long salmon rods—the establishment had now displayed its sign, it was a "fishing lodge." I looked on whilst the General, in very neat knickerbockers, made a critical and final examination of his book of flies and casts, and subsequently drove off with his niece behind a fat yellow pony. Mr. Hopkins and his boatman had already departed on foot.

"And now," said Joan, bustling out in a great white apron, "where is Miss Rivers? I've given her my own piece of water; for you see I'm busy—I believe she is hanging back! Rachel, like a good sort, will you drive up with her in the *stolkjærre*, start her fishing, and act the rôle of sympathetic spectator and candid friend?"

"Fancy me starting anyone salmon fishing!" I

exclaimed. "However, I shall be delighted to try," and I departed indoors in search of my hat.

Joan was a woman of prompt action. In a few moments she had packed us into the cart, with rods, landing-nets, basket, and gaff. Miss Rivers, looking absolutely inanimate, took the reins; Lars, the boatman, climbed up behind, and we speedily left the pretty curving avenue and proceeded up the valley at a smart pace; although seemingly asleep the girl could drive. The broad, flat road wound like a white ribbon through bright green pastures, all the time within sight and sound of the rushing, stormy water. The Rande was a fine but freakish river, making bold curves, and then seemingly changing its mind and twisting backwards; in one place it slid away smoothly, deceitfully dark and deep; in another it foamed between rugged rocks, and flung itself frantically over noisy rapids; and all the time the enchanting song of the many waters seemed to fill my ears.

There was no other sound to distract them, save the rumbling of our wheels and the pendulum note of a cuckoo in the forest across the valley, for my charioteer never once opened her lips. In dead silence we reached our destination, in dead silence we left the cart to the *skydsgut*, or pony-boy, and clambered down a steep bank to where a boat was moored. Miss Rivers, like some mechanical figure, stepped into this boat and began to arrange her line

and cast with an air of intolerable boredom. Thrown into relief against the dark forest, her profile looked as if it were cut out of cardboard. Meanwhile I remained on the rocks and waited to see what would happen, and presently the girl stood up, and as the little boat was rowed slowly into mid-stream she began to cast. For a long time I watched as she toiled and caught nothing. I escorted the boat by land in a sort of running accompaniment, stumbling along the gravel shore, and over rocks, and through bushes, declaring to myself that fly-fishing was a dull, monotonous waste of time. For one whole hour Miss Rivers stood casting—casting, and once again casting. Then all at once the rod bent, there was the sharp whizzing sound of a reel running out. Yes; Miss Rivers had hooked a fish! The boat was quickly beached, she sprang ashore and began to play the catch. The salmon gave wonderful sport, and, I must confess, had my profoundest sympathy. In my heart I sincerely hoped and almost prayed that it would get away. Now it rushed out with a hundred yards of line only to be steadily reeled back, again it sulked, next it splashed out of the water, and I caught the gleam of its bright silver side. The fish was making a frantic struggle for life, and I could see that Miss Rivers was pretty well exhausted. She even called out to me, "Oh, I can't hold him much longer!"

But by degrees she drew her victim nearer and still

nearer to shore, and suddenly the boatman, Lars, who was knee-deep in the river, made a furious swoop, like some bird of prey, and in another instant a great salmon, gaffed, lay flopping and struggling on the grass. Lars then seized a stone and despatched it with blows on the head—and this is the gentle art! —and presently the victim was motionless and dead.

"A fine fish!" he remarked, producing a business-like scale, and proceeding to weigh the prize.

Miss Rivers—what had become of that wan and melancholy person? Here was another girl, a little breathless, with sparkling eyes, and a brilliant colour in her face.

"Oh, a twenty-five pounder," she screamed, turning to me. "A beautiful cock fish!"

(I wondered why salmon were described in the terms of the poultry-yard?)

"Is it not splendid?" she continued, in short excited gasps; "the biggest fish I ever landed—and I was so done, I nearly lost him!"

By this time I had joined her, and prepared to fan her enthusiasm with discreet praise.

"You seem to know all about it," I said; "reeling in and reeling out, and playing; I must confess that if *I* were to hook a fish I'd be so frightened I should throw the rod into the water and run away!"

"Oh, no, you would not! It's the most exciting thing in the wide world; even hunting does not beat

it; and I've heard a man say that it was far ahead of tiger-shooting."

"Well, at any rate it is unattended with personal danger," I admitted; "who ever heard of a man-eating salmon?"

"Oh, it's not that, it's the thrilling feeling when the first pull comes and the reel runs out. I can't explain the sensation, but you'd know it if you fished."

"I shall never fish," I said decidedly; "but I am delighted you have been so lucky."

"Oh, yes, I'm always rather lucky." Then she came to a full stop; her bright look changed and pink colour faded.

"Are you not going to have another try?" I hastily suggested.

"Oh, yes, missis," interposed Lars, the boatman. (I soon discovered they were all enthusiasts.) "There is sure to be one in the long pool; better fish all you can; next week the logs come down."

The hint about the logmen sufficed. I left Miss Rivers again casting, and proceeded to walk homewards, surveying as I went the bends of road and river and the different situations of various turf-roofed farmsteads, unfenced and unwalled, standing, so to speak, knee-deep in meadow. The grass, now ripe for cutting, was in some places of a bright rose-coloured hue, fading away into a delicate mauve. Here and there I noticed great patches of brilliant yellow or blue flowers. I had no idea what descrip-

tion of fodder this produced, but it was undeniably beautiful to the eye, as it waved in a shifting maze of red and lilac, bronze and blue.

At Randval I was not the first arrival by any means. There on the grass under the cherry tree gleamed three fine fish, and General Bassett was volubly explaining to Mrs. Valdy—who stood in the verandah—the exact and exciting history of each individual capture.

His boatman solemnly weighed them, while a little crowd assembled and gave their opinion.

"And I caught one," interposed Miss Dovey. "Fancy that!"

"Oh, she was only harling, and hooked the twenty-pounder, but I played him," protested the General. "Now, I wonder what the others have done?"

"Here comes Mr. Hopkins," cried Joan, as a *stolk-jærre* bustled up, and from it descended the great catch and his gaffer, carrying a basket from which protruded a fish's silver tail.

"There," said Mr. Hopkins, throwing it out on the grass. "A thirty-pounder!" and I could see that he found it a hard struggle to stifle his complacency.

"Oh, I say, what a beauty! Where did you get him?" demanded the General.

"In the slack water under the bank by the big rock in Silon. He rose twice. So I hear"—turning to me—"that Miss Rivers has a fish?"

"Yes."

"Then we have five the first morning! I call that splendid," said the General, "and I'm so sorry you were not out, Mrs. Val—we might have established a record; there are lots of fish moving up. I'll go now and put down these four, and their weight, before we forget them."

And he hurried into the drawing-room to write up his book and mark the items on the paper.

During dinner the conversation was entirely on the subject of fish and local news.

The logmen were sending timber down from above Tiscoe. The people on the top water (a man and his secretary) had been awfully bothered, so Peter, the gaffer, had told the General, "And now," he grumbled, "*we* shall have them, unless a flood comes."

"Oh, a few fine hot days will melt the snows and raise the river," rejoined Mr. Hopkins; "it was very high last night. Hullo! here comes Miss Rivers!"

Joan and Mr. Hopkins rose simultaneously, hurried to the verandah, and shouted, "What have you got?"

Miss Rivers looked quite merry and rosy as she held up two fingers and nodded triumphantly.

The General, throwing down his serviette, and saying, "By Jove, she has got *two!*" ran out to see the fish exhibited and weighed.

Thus Miss Bassett and I were left *tête-à-tête*—the meal was deserted, the soup ignored.

Dovey glanced over at me, and giggled. "If I

were to rush out like this at home, Uncle Dick would be scandalised. Isn't it odd, the fish fever? I wonder if I shall catch it?"

"I don't think you will."

"Oh, but I must—there is nothing else to do! I made a bad beginning to-day. I dropped Uncle's pet knife overboard, and when I tried to cast I caught in a bush, and then in his coat, and destroyed a special 'silver grey'—but I shall improve."

"And here they all come!" I interrupted.

"Twenty-five and twenty-two—both fresh-run, and fine thick fish!" announced the General as he sat down. "Capital, Miss Rivers, capital!" and he looked at her approvingly, while she stood pulling off her gloves.

"I'd no idea you were so expert," said Joan; "two fish on the top beat; but you had Lars, the best gaffer; and you had the boat with the white oars."

She nodded.

"Yes, that is the *lucky* one. Now, do sit down; you must be hungry."

"Starving!" was the unusual and satisfactory reply.

CHAPTER VIII

AS UNDERSTUDY

IT was marvellous how easily we settled down together in our accustomed life, and how soon we adapted ourselves to some unaccustomed offices. I am sure the last thing I ever expected was to find Miss Rivers's dexterous fingers arrange my thick and unruly locks; she was an expert hairdresser. Paulette would have been cruelly triumphant had she witnessed my long and arduous struggles with nets, pins, and side-combs, and the truly humiliating result; but with a few firm, self-confident twists Miss Rivers made me presentable. To whisper the truth —we were mutual ladies' maids.

As I am an excellent needlewoman, I undertook all her sewing and mending, for Miss Rivers was abroad all day long, and generally returned too tired to do anything but relate her experiences, rearrange her fly-box, eat her supper, and go to bed.

We were firm friends now, and I was also attached to Dovey Bassett. I found that she, although three-and-twenty years of age, was as artless and impulsive

as a child of twelve—delighted to see something of a new life, anxious to turn every precious moment to account, but by no means anxious to angle for a rich husband.

One evening before supper, as we strolled together up and down the sandy avenue, she suddenly accorded me her confidence.

"I don't know what it is, Miss Bosworth, but I can talk to you as if I had known you for years instead of days, you are so magnetic and sympathetic. Miss Rivers, for instance, was so odd and statue-like till you took her in hand; now she is just like other people, until she suddenly remembers *something*, and pulls herself up and becomes woebegone. I should say that naturally she has the wildest spirits; I wonder what is on her mind."

"Well, my dear, it is her affair, not ours."

"Then, Miss Bosworth, I should much like to tell you what is on *my* mind," she said, slipping her arm under mine. "Has it ever struck you that Uncle Richard would like to make up a match between—now I'm really ashamed to whisper it—Mr. Hopkins——"

"And whom?"

"*Me!*" she answered, under her breath.

"No, indeed, never—never," I repeated emphatically.

"He used to be always praising Mr. Hopkins to mother, and I noticed that he would walk away and

leave us together on board; and when he comes into the verandah, and we are sitting there, it seems to me that he goes off on tiptoe!"

"I am certain you are mistaken; it is all your fancy, which is, I must say, free! Your uncle is the last man in the world to dabble in match-making, for he is too wise to burn his fingers!"

"And if he were to do so, he would have all his trouble for nothing. Mr. Hopkins is afraid of me, terribly afraid; he is only civil because I am Uncle Dick's niece. I am not his style, and he is not my style; for all his wealth I would not marry him, he is too heavy and prosaic, and I could never get over his feet. I assure you, the day he took me out fishing his boots filled the boat."

Here was a pretty way for a girl to speak of a millionaire! Oh, if her mother could but listen to her.

"I may be silly," she pursued, "but I am not mercenary. I'd rather go to sea as a stewardess—and I'm a dreadful sailor—than marry a man for his money."

"Then have you some poor man already in your heart?"

"No, no, indeed! I am so happy here, only for this hideous suspicion that Uncle Dick wants me to marry Mr. Hopkins, and that Mr. Hopkins is secretly trembling lest I should endeavour to land him! He always avoids me."

"And is, so to speak, sulking at the bottom of the pool. You see, I have become quite 'fishy.'"

"Yes, where I shall leave him undisturbed. My husband—if I ever marry—must be good looking and full of go and energy, and I should be wasted on a rich man, for I can cook quite well and make my own frocks." (I was not surprised to hear *this*.) "And I can get up lace beautifully. We have always had 'small means.' I do not suppose that any one of us will ever change our names. We live in a little country circle, our only excitements are a bazaar, or having the curate to supper on Sundays, or very dull garden-parties. This trip to Norway is a wonderful pleasure to me. Now I shall have something to talk of, and to think about, for the rest of my life. I am only sorry that Uncle Dick could not bring us *all*."

"What—five girls! My dear, think of poor Mrs. Valdy—she would have died of the shock!"

"Of course," she laughed. "I know Uncle Dick had quite a battle to bring me; but you will understand that my pleasure is watered down when I feel that *I* am the sole one to see and enjoy this beautiful country. I was foolish enough to hope for dances and picnics and the usual English gaieties; now I don't want anything of that kind. Norway is more than enough—I love her!"

"Do you? Well, I hope, my dear, that you may some day meet some nice poor young man, who

will love you! Ah, there is the supper-bell—come along."

Our days were undeniably lacking in events or adventures. After breakfast the fishers started off, returning about two o'clock to early dinner. No one was waited for; if a place was vacant, it was hoped the absentee was "in a fish." After the meal, people rested and read. Tea was at five o'clock, and then they once more sallied forth till nine or ten, when they trooped home to a cheery and excellent cold supper of lobster, ham, fowl, junkets, and cream. I, being the sole non-fisher, had a good deal of spare time on my hands, but I never felt the least lonely, for I dropped inadvertently into the post of deputy-housekeeper, and "the housekeeper" became my nickname.

I rambled into the woods and up the fields, and gathered stacks of lovely wild flowers, and decorated the dining-table and the drawing-room with daisies, curious grasses, and ferns, mauve foxgloves (the mere spectres of those in the South), purple flowers, campanulas, poppies, and lilies of the valley. Besides this, I tidied away books and papers, and received messages on the telephone for Joan, gave my decision with regard to the sweets, conferred with Oscar respecting the killing of a sheep or the smoking of a salmon. One never knows what one may come to! I wonder what my cook-housekeeper would have said to my new rôle?

Besides this occupation, I discovered that the verandah was a sort of public mart.

Often as I sat alone within the drawing-room a certain peculiar cough summoned me forth, and there I invariably discovered one or two women with "something to sell"; generally a large roll of tweed woven in the winter, or socks and knitted gloves, pieces of crochet, squares of appallingly brilliant scarlet and green carpet, or painted wooden boxes.

When we first arrived, the women trooped in at the rate of half a dozen a day. And Joan explained to me that they looked to the lodges and fisherfolk as their sole and legitimate market, that they were all pitifully poor, and the purchase was a good deed, even if the tweeds were heavy and hideous—*buy we must.* Mr. Hopkins and the General were ordered to purchase, and each selected a large piece, so did I, and also Joan and Miss Rivers. Our investments made a huge pile, like the stock of a shop; also we laid in socks and gloves in dozens, various families had benefited to some extent; but still the little cough called me out, to find sometimes a child with wild strawberries, sometimes with a nest of rare bird's eggs, sometimes with a piece of embroidery or carving. It was the rule of the house to pay one fixed price, and to give the small seller sweets, or a slice of cake; if a grown-up, bread and butter and a piece of salmon.

This sitting at the receipt of custom was a duty;

occasionally for pleasure I sat out on the *stoep* and enjoyed a talk with Oscar, who lived in a fine big house close by.

Oscar had been born in the valley, and by industry and ability had advanced himself to the position of leading man. He was agent for many fishings, not only in the Randval, but elsewhere. Also he was well read and a great politician, and knew what was happening all round—thanks to the telephone. Oscar and his wife were well-to-do; they had cows and ponies, servant-maids to milk and weave, but at a moment's notice he would row a fisher or drive a *stolkjærre* as readily and better than anyone. I gathered from Oscar that the valley, smiling as it looked, was miserably poor. Six bad seasons had nearly ruined the farmers; the hay and barley, their sole support, had withered or rotted on the ground.

"And if there is no fodder, how can we keep cattle and sheep for eight months' winter, even giving them birch bark to eat? So, missus,"—he called everyone "missus"—"the stock has to be killed, and then there is no milk, no butter, no eggs; people have to put up with coffee and barley and bread, you see, and when summer comes, they are so thin they look like skeletons."

"And how do they pass the winter?" I inquired.

"Working always—the men at carpentering and baskets, and the women knitting or weaving. Some men cut down the forests, and bring the logs on

sleighs to the river. Oh, it is hard work; the cold is bitter, and the days are short. If we have not a good year this time, I expect many will go to America."

"And that is a pity."

"Truly it is, but what can you do? I heard a pastor addressing six hundred young people who were emigrating, and he said: 'See, here is all the blood and sinew going out of the country!' And he spoke so strongly and warmly, he wept, but at the end he said: 'Children, I cannot blame you; there is no food here. I myself follow you to the other land within a month.'"

"Dear me!" I ejaculated.

"Now, do you see that farm next but one to this?"

I looked, and saw close to the river a great, bare, two-storied house, and pile of log outbuildings.

"The land had been in the man's family many generations; last year he had to sell it for his debts —all but the house; he worked and worked, but it was no use; well, it broke his heart, and he died. Now his son has it, and lives there with his wife and two children and old grandmother. It will break his heart too. He is a stock man—he works the logs down; you see them wading in with long poles; they don't live long—the stock men—the water is so cold, they die young."

At this moment a servant came out and called to

Oscar, and he said, "There is someone for Mrs. Valdy at the telephone. Will you come and hear?"

Thus invited, I followed him to his house and into his best sitting-room, a fine, large apartment, full of old Norwegian furniture, including a huge clock and dower chest. There, in a corner, was the all-important telephone.

I took it and applied it to my ear, and a treble voice inquired—

"Are you Mrs. Valdy?"

"No," I answered. "She is out at present; but I am acting for her."

"Oh, thank you. I am Mrs. Dering, of Tor."

"What can I do for you?"

"Will you lend me a leg of mutton?"

It sounded like this. Surely my ears must have deceived me. I waited to be certain.

Then the voice distinctly repeated, "*A leg of mutton.*"

"Of course," I answered; "certainly, with pleasure."

"All right, I'll send up a boy—thank you; good-bye!"

"Right, right," said Oscar, when I had explained the request. "They are new to the country, and all in disorder, I am afraid. She is quite a young lady, and the captain is young, too; but I'm sorry for the poor sick man."

"Why?" I very naturally inquired.

Oscar shook his head, and said, "Oh! excuse me, I may not tell you; it would not be polite, and it is not my business."

Feeling that my curiosity had been whipped and put in the corner, I departed to interview our cook and despatch the joint, marvelling to myself why Oscar so sincerely pitied "the poor sick man."

CHAPTER IX

THE PEOPLE DOWN BELOW

ONE beautiful afternoon it occurred to me that I would like to walk down to the ferry, cross the river, and view the valley from the opposite side. Two miles from us was "the shop," where they sold everything from flour and boots, teacups, men's dickeys, and sailor hats, to pins and peppermints. There was also the post-office, to which once a week we repaired and sat round and helped to sort the letters. And below the post-office a boat, which was worked across the river by a wheel and a rope.

As I stood marvelling how I was to effect a passage the postmaster himself appeared, and politely proceeded to despatch me across the Rande. What a curious experience—floating on a wide, rapid water, without oars or visible means of transport. I landed clumsily, over my boots in water, and scrambled up the bank. There were no fences whatever in the valley, and I proceeded by a pathway through the grass until I came to a road that ran parallel to

the river. I passed several houses, and here and there a woman or a child.

This side of the valley was extremely pretty and open, and I made for several farms clustered together near the wooden church, with its sharp little spire.

I found that the church was locked, but I peered in through a window and beheld a gallery and seats, and was surprised to see much ornamented altar figures, crude pictures, and carvings, for hitherto I always understood that the Lutheran form of worship was simple and unadorned. Outside were many grassy mounds, most of them with small iron tablets, giving age and name of the departed. The most frequent names were Lars and Britte. It was a sunny, peaceful spot, lying half-way between the river and the pine-clad mountains.

From the church I continued onward, passing several solid red farmhouses and a bright blue school. I felt that I was really making an important expedition, but except a boy herding some cows, and a man mending a roof, I had not seen a soul.

However, presently I became aware that someone was running after me (let me remark that this is a detestable sensation), and turned abruptly, to discover that a short, fair-haired woman in a dark cotton dress and a large spotted pinafore was gasping beside me.

"Missis," and she pointed to a large yellow house close by, standing not far from the right, "Kom!"

I halted at once—perhaps I was in for an adventure! Well, I felt in an adventurous mood, and I nodded affably to the emissary, who grinned and preceded me at a sort of shuffling trot. We crossed a rich meadow, and cleared the corner of the big log house, and on the steps in front of it I beheld a very pretty young woman, in pretty lilac muslin, who extended her hands as if in me she recognised a well-beloved and long-lost friend.

"Ah, it is so *sweet* of you to come," she began. "Gerty saw you from the kitchen and called 'the lady from the big house is passing.' Such an event! I've not seen an Englishwoman for three weeks, and I want so much to thank you for that leg of mutton."

"It was Mrs. Valdy's leg of mutton," I replied. "I am Miss Bosworth; I don't fish, and she instals me as her regent."

"Well, it came as a boon and a blessing, I do assure you! Won't you come in, please?" And she almost drove me into the house before her.

I found myself in a large bare room lighted by four windows. There was an iron stove, a table or two, some folding canvas chairs, and a bookcase. Possibly all deficiencies were supposed to be supplied by that most uncommon ornament—a *real* wall-paper.

And such a paper! A wall-paper that half blinded me. Involuntarily I stood still, and gave a little gasp. It was a design of the hardest, most uncompromising blue, with vivid orange zigzags nearly a foot wide.

"Yes, is not it astounding?" said Mrs. Dering. "Perhaps, if you look long enough, you may see 'Pears' Soap'! Please sit down—this is quite a safe chair—and do let me look at you. It is such a pleasure to see someone in a London frock, instead of these native dark gowns and aprons, such as they have worn since the days of Canute."

"I think it a pity they don't stick to the national costume. It is so striking and becoming."

"Yes, isn't it? I saw a girl wearing it the other day, but instead of the head-dress her hair was crowned by a battered sailor-hat. I felt inclined to snatch it off her head. How do you like Norway?"

"Very much indeed," I replied. "And you?"

"Oh! I think it is a frightful country, and I wish we had never, never set foot in it."

"But I heard you had capital sport?" I argued.

"Thirty-five fish already, but what is sport without food? Yes, you may stare, Miss Bosworth, but I do assure you that many a night I have known what it is to go to bed hungry. I've scarcely ever had enough to eat the last three weeks."

"I don't understand. Why, we fare sumptuously every day."

"I am sure you do," she acquiesced, with emphasis; "and I have often thought of you with envy, hatred, and malice. Mrs. Valdy has been sixteen years in the valley, is a first-rate manager, and knows the country, as an old resident; she has

excellent, well-trained servants, her own cows, and gets a weekly supply of vegetables—I won't call them fresh—from Hull."

"It is all quite true," I admitted meekly.

"You will wonder how I know? Oh, the telephone is a shocking gossip! On the other hand we are strangers, almost babes in the wood. Billy fished once in Norway as a bachelor; his friend ran the house, and he assured me that catering it was as easy as falling off a log; not to bother, and to come along. The Welwyns had this fishing last year and *loved* it, and he declared that Norway was a land flowing with milk and butter, and eggs and salmon, and that, if we brought out some tea and tins of biscuits, and a supply of tobacco and toilet soap, we should not know a want."

"Yes," I said. "And do you?"

"As it happens, I want *everything*," throwing up two little hands. "I listened to Billy, and turned a deaf ear to suggestions, advice, and offers of hints, and lists from people. I told them that we were going to live quite *simply* and enjoy a purely Arcadian life for two heavenly months. I brought my maid; she remained exactly three days—spent most of the time in hysterics, and returned in the next post boat."

"A good riddance!"

"Well, yes, one less to feed. When we arrived here we were enchanted with the place, and the river was in perfect order; but you cannot live on scenery

and water, now, can you?" she asked, and her pretty little face looked wistfully into mine.

I humbly confessed that I had never tried.

"The house is as you see it—awfully clean," she continued. "There are enough beds and linen and knives and forks and plates—if we only had something to put on them! We found two boatmen awaiting us, also 'Gerty,' whom you have seen, and another girl. They can scarcely speak English, never have been in English service. Ole, the old boatman, got them. I believe they are his nieces, and they have come to *learn* cooking and waiting. I'm sure," half hysterically, "*I* cannot teach them!"

"Well, no, I suppose not," I assented.

"I showed Gerty how to lay the cloth—not being very sure of it myself,—and how to make a rice pudding—again not very sure. I am tired of telling her how to do things. She does nothing, and does that badly, and her only word is "Ees." Her craze is scrubbing the floors and tables. In spite of all that I can sign, and even scream to her, my room is washed out daily; once I found her scouring the stairs with my precious toilet soap! And she always empties the baths and basins out of the window. Billy got such a ducking yesterday, and he did swear! Then as to provisions, Gerty bakes the bread, and we get flour and coffee at the shop, and fowl the size of canary birds, butter by a desperate struggle, and, of course, salmon. I wrote for stores to England;

they have not arrived, and the only things we are not out of, are tobacco and tooth powder. It is bad enough for Billy and me, but there is my sailor brother, Jack—he is navigating lieutenant in the *Tamurlane*—and in risking his life to save a terrible boiler accident he has been badly hurt, and is on sick leave from his ship. Well, we simply compelled him to come to Norway, declaring that the bracing air and the good wholesome food, would completely set him up, and the poor fellow is half starved." Here two big tears glittered in her pretty eyes. "And Billy, who has really the temper of an angel, is frightfully irritable—so deadly sick of salmon; and no wonder, it is in everything, even in the bath water! all we eat and drink tastes of it; I loathe the very sight of it, but we must *live!*"

"But surely there is capital mutton," I remarked.

"Only by special arrangement with some farm on the mountain. Once, as an enormous favour, Ole, the boatman, got me a joint, and, oh! I was so proud, and cock-a-hoop boasting to Jack and Billy. 'You shall have a wonderful dinner to-night!' and they surely *had.* The poor little joint came up a mere black cinder. Gerty had roasted it for five mortal hours! Billy and Jack were famished and so disappointed; and as for me, I actually *wept.*"

"Really, I am truly sorry for you," I said.

"And what do you think I discovered Gerty doing? Boiling their coffee in our kettle, and the

784068

water for our tea in a saucepan. So no wonder it tasted of salmon! And when I scold them, they go away into the kitchen and *sing*."

"You will have to get a really efficient cook, who speaks English and is accustomed to English people. I am sure Mrs. Valdy will do her best to find you one at once."

"Oh, if she only would! How I should bless her! I thought of going up to see her, but I did not like to, as we are new people,—and she has not called."

"My dear Mrs. Dering," I exclaimed, "there is none of that sort of thing out here. We leave card-cases and convention at home. I know she will be only too glad to see you, and give you all the help in her power."

"It is so good of you to console me. I can't tell you how wretched I've been. I am so stupid and inexperienced, and all my pleasure here is spoilt. I cannot enjoy fishing, even when I've landed a big one, for when the first flush of triumph is over, I am depressed by the awful conviction that there is next to nothing for dinner. And oh! here is tea," she said, as Gerty opened the door with her foot and clumped in, carrying a tray with two cups, a white china teapot, and a plate of bread and butter.

"Oh, triumph!" boasted Mrs. Dering. "I've actually taught her this!"

Alas! her triumph proved but short-lived. The

bread and butter had been cut with a fishy knife, and the tea was distinctly flavoured.

"I can't even offer you a biscuit," she cried. "Yesterday we devoured the last tin for supper. Well, perhaps when things come to the worst they mend. You realise, I hope, that I am not exaggerating?"

"No, indeed!" I replied. "I almost wonder you are alive!"

"Our stores ought to come in a day or two—tinned things, and ham, and cakes, and jam. Meanwhile we must endeavour to try and hold out. Did you not think it funny, my begging for a leg of mutton? But we were in despair—and had had no dinner.

"The chief feature of the dinner was to have been a salmon pie! It was Jack's idea—a sea pie—and it proved absolutely the last straw! Imagine bacon, salmon, and onions all mixed together—the very thought of it makes me ill! As a desperate resource, I went to the telephone, and without ceremony begged a joint. It was excellent. We thoroughly enjoyed it, please tell Mrs. Valdy. Please also ask her if, like a good Christian woman and the kind lady of the valley, she will introduce me to a butcher or a farmer?"

"She will, I am sure, and go shares with you in sheep and get you servants. And now I must be moving—it is getting quite late."

"If you will wait a moment I will come part of the

way with you, and if we go near the end beat, Jack can put you across in his boat."

We walked down the path to the river bank, and along it for some distance, until we descried a man in a boat, fishing.

"Poor fellow, he is so weak!" she exclaimed; "but he is awfully keen, and will fish—the ruling passion."

She whistled, and the fisherman turned about, and seemed amazed to descry two figures.

"Jack," she called as we came nearer. "This is Miss Bosworth from the upper house."

Jack doffed his cap, and I saw a young man with a pair of keen blue eyes and a clever, attractive face—a sailor's face—with the steady look, and alert, resolved expression.

He seemed wofully wasted and hollow-cheeked; in fact, I had never beheld anyone so painfully thin. He was tall, and the hand which grasped the rod was almost like that of a skeleton.

His dark blue eyes gazed so kindly and frankly back into mine, and he had such a charming expression, that my elderly heart went out to him, on the spot.

"Miss Bosworth, we have to thank you for a feast," he said, with a broad smile.

"I hope it is merely the forerunner of many," I answered briskly.

"I am delighted to hear you say so, for we are not very good housekeepers," and he glanced at his sister

and laughed; "and sometimes I've fancied we were at Ladysmith."

"I wish we had known of the state of affairs."

"I wish you had, but we"—and he again laughed at his sister—"are shy, except when driven to despair by a salmon pie. Have you had good sport?"

"Excellent; but I don't fish."

"So much the better, for you can come and see us," put in Mrs. Dering. "Now, Jack, you are to be ferryman, and row us across."

"No, no!" I remonstrated, "let the boatman do that."

"You think I am delicate," protested the invalid. "I am not such a feeble creature as I look, and if you will allow me—you know I am a sailor by profession—I will row you back to your own march. But I will leave old Ole here—he weighs a ton! Come along, Mab, do you get in too," and in another moment we had pushed off, and he was rowing us up the river.

It was a lovely evening, which I was enjoying thoroughly; I liked my two companions, who were evidently much attached to one another, and with regard to myself agreeably unaffected and friendly.

As Jack rowed, I had a still better opportunity of realising how shockingly emaciated he was; his wrists were so bony, his knees and his jawbones so prominent; he was the wreck of a fine, well-built young fellow, and the unusual exertion was telling

on him sorely; I could see that beads of perspiration stood on his forehead, for he was pulling up-stream.

With this conviction in my mind, I suddenly stood up, and said, "You must not take me any further. I shall land here, please."

"But you are not half-way," he remonstrated.

"Thank you—please put me ashore. I wish to call at the shop." (An invention on the spur of the moment.) "I really must disembark."

"All right, then," he said, putting into the bank; "and if you can give provisions a fair wind in our direction, you will deserve to be decorated by the Humane Society. Now let me help you," and he sprang out, and dragged the boat inshore, in order that I might land dry-shod. He had the will, poor fellow, but not the strength to accomplish his gallant intention. "Here, give me your hands," he said, and ere I was aware of it he had lifted me bodily in his arms, and placed me on *terra firma* as cautiously and as tenderly as if I had been labelled "glass—with care."

"Forgive me," he said; "but it was the only way; there's no landing here." And I forgave him; for it is undeniably agreeable to a middle-aged spinster to receive a momentary reflection of the homage accorded to her in her lost youth. I offered him my hand and thanks, and then took leave of my new friends, and proceeded to scale the bank; before I was half-way I heard Mrs. Dering screaming after

me, and I caught the words "shop—send us some dried *herrings*," and turning about waved an emphatic assent.

"Vain old Rachel!" I said to myself, as I continued my climb. "You are pleased with those young people because they are so attentive; and especially interested in the sailor—as in all sailors. Poor fellow! He looks half starved. Well, you must do your best to supply their larder."

My thoughts were still entirely engaged with my new acquaintances and all that I was going to say to Joan on their behalf, when I arrived in front of Randval House. I was too preoccupied to notice anything for the first moment, but my glance instinctively sought the grass under the cherry tree, where was ever displayed the day's "take."

Then I suddenly caught sight of a squat figure reposing in an armchair in the verandah, and immediately recognised that Mr. Gregory Clegg had arrived at last.

CHAPTER X

THE FIFTH ROD

"I SUPPOSE you are one of our party?" he asked in a condescending, creaking voice, half rising as I stepped up on the verandah.

"Ah, you are Mr. Clegg, and have only just arrived?"

"Yes, about an hour ago — fagging journey! Awfully out of the world here, eh, are you not?"

"'The world forgetting, by the world forgot,'" I quoted. "Have you had anything to eat?"

"Oh, rather; Mrs. Valdy is in, she looked after me, and has done me very well. Quite a number of ladies, I understand—no less than four!" and his expression conveyed a dissatisfaction bordering on disgust.

"Yes," I assented, "but only two fish seriously, Mrs. Valdy and Miss Rivers. Miss Bassett is a mere trifler, and I don't fish at all."

"And may I ask what you do?"

"Enjoy myself."

"Um!" and he considered me gravely; I looked

at him—a man of fifty, short, with round shoulders, a round, clean-shaven face, a fringe of reddish hair, and a pair of prominent greenish eyes. His teeth were very white and perfect; he had a habit of nibbling with his lips. He was dressed with great care—there was a finish about his toilet that hinted at personal vanity; his knickerbockers and stockings and tie were all the same shade of subdued greeny grey, and in a way matched his eyes. His ankles and feet were extremely neat, also his hands, which he flourished incessantly.

"Now, do stay and tell me who are here," he asked, with an air of affectionate persuasion. "You see, I am the last comer—the stranger."

"There is General Bassett," I began with civil formality, "his niece, Miss Bassett, Mr. Hopkins——"

He nodded. "Ah! I know, the plaster man!"

"And Miss Rivers."

"Now who is she?"

"Miss Rivers is—Miss Rivers, she has come to fish."

"Miss Rivers come to fish a river? She is not a—queer fish, eh?"

"You can soon have an opportunity of judging," I said stiffly. "And now I must really go in."

He moved aside, and made me a funny little bow, and I noticed that he called up the man who was unpacking his rods—undoubtedly to inquire about *me*.

Joan was in the store-room, which was situated between the kitchen and dining-room, with a door into each; an important apartment, and would have made a nice boudoir, but it was lined with shelves, and these shelves were covered with carefully arranged and assorted supplies—no fear of a famine at Randval. Hams hung from the ceiling, there was a big flour bin, great canisters of rice, tapioca, and meal, tins of biscuits, bottles of fruit, and sauces; ink, notepaper—it was like a little shop.

At a table, writing out lists and orders, sat the shopwoman. She glanced up and said, "Lucky I came home! I lost a cast—for I found Mr. Clegg had arrived. I did not expect him till to-morrow; he took a special steam launch; you have seen him, of course?"; she paused interrogatively.

"I have," I rejoined. "And let me at once reassure you; it is not a case of love at first sight! I hope Mr. Clegg bears no resemblance to the disagreeable grey insect, peculiar to these parts, who stings so venomously."

"What nonsense!" she exclaimed. "And pray where have *you* been all this time?"

Without a moment's delay I proceeded to pour forth the distressful history of my afternoon's call, and relate the woes of the poor people down below—the next lodge was always "the people down below," and the top water "the people up above."

Joan's sympathy was immediately enlisted when she heard of the tragedy of the salmon pie and the emaciated figure of the invalid sailor.

"I am greatly to blame!" she cried. "I feel horribly ashamed of myself. Of course, with all this"—waving her arm at the shelves—"and with sixteen people to feed, and fishing regularly, I've not given a thought to the new arrivals. I simply forgot them, and as the oldest resident in the valley I generally make inquiries, and have the neighbours on either side to dinner each Sunday if they are men I know. I am shocked at what you tell me, for I always do my best to help visitors to enjoy their stay in—in——"

"Well, it has not proved a 'Happy Valley' to the Derings," I protested; "more like the valley of 'dry bones'! What are you going to do? If you won't send them immediate relief I shall take them my own supper. I believe they are living on herrings, and the hope of stores deferred."

"I shall write this very instant," seizing a sheet of paper; "how do you spell her name?"

"She won't mind how you spell her name, as long as you send her some food!"

Here she scribbled in silence, and then said, "I shall despatch one of the pony boys with this note, in which I apologise for my unneighbourly behaviour, and invite them all to supper to-morrow night, when we can arrange for supplies, and sharing sheep.

I shall telephone down the valley and get her a capital cook, who, by good luck, is at home just now. I am telling her, also, that I send per messenger—or lend, if she is proud—a pair of roast fowl, a tin of pears, and a large seed cake; that will keep the wolf from the door. Who is this?"

The door into the dining-room happened to be ajar, and a bald head was thrust in; it was the head of Mr. Clegg. Such an intrusion was unprecedented—unique; I could see Joan stiffening.

"Oh, the store-room!" and his quick green eyes roved from shelf to shelf. "How very delightful!—ah! bottled calves'-jelly, apricots, caviare!" He rubbed his hands. "I see you ladies are conferring together, and no doubt preparing some delicious edible for dinner. So much the better! Mrs. Valdy, in me you have an appreciative guest. I, so my friends declare, am a very *greedy* man," and with this shameless announcement, he closed the door and vanished.

Joan and I exchanged glances, and I could see that she was no longer *quite* so favourably impressed.

"I am positive he is a Clegg!" I declared. "Why did you take him?"

"Because he was so keen to come, and really is a good fisherman. He went with the Fullers last year—they gave him my address. I also met him, as you know, out at dinner."

"But the Fullers come to Norway every season. They are on the Sande now."

"Yes; but what are you trying to insinuate?"

"That they have discovered that he is—a Clegg, and they have passed him on to *you!*"

.

"We are seven," remarked Mr. Clegg, casting his eyes round the supper table, "like the dear little family in Wordsworth's poem."

"Most of them were elsewhere, as well as I can recollect," I rejoined.

"Yes, so they were; 'but there's luck in odd numbers, said Rory O'More.'

"That was a fine fish you brought in, General—a twenty-seven pounder—fish run bigger here than in the Falda."

"It was not my fish—Miss Rivers is our lucky rod," he rejoined. "I only caught a small one, but we are getting on—forty fish in less than a fortnight."

"Um, yes, I've been looking at the score in the drawing-room—I see a good many go to E.M.R." He stared across at Miss Rivers and said, "I hope you have left one or two for poor little me?"

"Yes, they are moving up," she replied. "It is a first-rate river."

"Where have you fished before?" he demanded point blank.

She hesitated for a second, and then replied, "Oh, on the Dee—and the Spey."

"Indeed!" eagerly; "whereabouts? I know the Spey well."

"Various parts," she answered, lifting her eyes slowly to his with her calm, direct gaze; and then, as the meal was concluded, she pushed back her chair, and went into the verandah.

"Do you bring us any news from town?" inquired the General.

"Not much what you would call news. I can tell you any quantity of scandal and gossip."

"Ah! we are much too simple to understand either!" protested Joan. "It is a remarkable thing that, once here, we never miss the postman's knock or pine for the daily paper."

"Really! Too much engrossed otherwise?"

"Yes; once a week we get a pile; a boy brings them up from the post-office in a carpet-bag, and we devour our letters, glance at the headlines in the papers, look at the pictures, and that is all. Kingdoms may rise and fall for all *we* know."

"Or care," put in the General. "I must admit that fishing is a most selfish and absorbing passion. Give me the one physiological moment before the river rises, when the water just begins to creep—give me a fine day, a good sixteen-foot rod, a treble gut cast, the fly of my heart, and leave me —alone!"

"That is all very fine," said Mr. Clegg; "you are a fanatic; but though I enjoy salmon fishing, I can still take a healthy interest in the world and my fellow-creatures across the North Sea. I must say I like to know what is going on."

"And I suppose you generally contrive to be well informed," I remarked.

"Yes, it is so interesting to watch people's lives; and to see how they develop is far more absorbing to me than reading novels. Novels are fiction, made up to amuse; but give me facts—thrilling facts that take place under our very eyes; events which one can help or retard by a little pull or push. Now, there was that affair of Lady Sue, La Rose, and John Langstaffe—you knew the man, Mrs. Valdy?—and the gossip about her bridge losings——"

"Yes," she assented, "but we are so far away from that sort of talk here—it is another world; yes, and a better world—and I'd rather not hear anything about him." She concluded with a nervous glance at Dovey and Miss Rivers.

"Well, no, not *now;* it's not exactly a Sunday-school tale. I say, what sort of people have the other fishings?"

"A Mr. and Mrs. Dering are below."

"Oh, yes, he was in the Guards, and married last year; he has tons of money."

"And up above, at Tostig, we have Lord Scarcliffe and a friend, Mr. Knox."

"Scarcliffe is an old bear; I am sorry for the friend. By the way, I came out with a connection of his lordship's—awfully good-looking chap—seemed down on his luck. I tried to find out what was bringing him over, as he does not fish; but it was no go."

"I see," said General Bassett, "he would not rise; hadn't got the right sort of fly on, eh, Clegg?"

"No; as silent as a mute. Looked as if he had buried all his relations."

"Perhaps he is sad because he had *not* buried some of them," said Joan. "Well, now, shall we adjourn to the next room and leave you all to smoke and talk scandal?"

With the arrival of Mr. Clegg a new era commenced; our cheerful *camaraderie* had disappeared, we were ashamed to allude to our paltry jokes and nicknames in his presence, and, indeed, he gave us but scanty opportunity of speaking at all.

Formerly the conversation was based on fish, the day's catch, the experience of each individual, the pool, the fly, the gaffer; this dish was varied, but reappeared. There was no envy or jealousy, but praise and admiration; and each arrival, as they drove up with their boatmen, was either hailed and acclaimed, or sympathised and mourned with. Now, the conversation was chiefly on the subject of "Clegg." He chattered continuously, and always of himself; he had a disagreeable creaking voice that

made itself heard no matter how we talked, and with polite persistence, endeavoured to drown it!

It is with deep reluctance that I am compelled to set down the melancholy fact that Mr. Clegg was an unpleasant sportsman—selfish, boastful, and jealous. When he succeeded and brought in a fine prize his crows were ear-piercing. All his house mates became as dust under his feet, and were trampled into the very ground; and yet I do not know which was the more painful—his success or his failure. Two or three blank days inevitably brought him to the brink of self-destruction; his voluble excuses, his loud bewailings, his lachrymose self-pity were all but insupportable. Then, again, he was so jealous. More than once he jockeyed his partners out of their turn, out of a lucky boat, or out of a lucky fly. And when they arrived home laden with silver spoil, he became positively green with envy—and an envy that was not *dumb*.

The most successful of all our anglers was Enid, whose good fortune never deserted her, and who drove up day after day unabashed and smiling, with the tails of heavy fish sticking out of her basket.

Then Mr. Clegg would growl, and turn over the salmon after it was weighed, and say, "I fished carefully that *very* spot yesterday, and he rose to the fly." He looked as if he thought the catch was really his own legitimate property.

"I wonder you dare bring home such fish," I said to her, "when you see how much it annoys poor Mr. Clegg."

"Surely you don't expect me to *bury* them, or give them away before I come in, do you? And, to tell you the truth, I enjoy it; I like to see his cheeks puff out, and to make him jealous. Never again talk of a woman's jealousy! He cannot bear me; he would say of me what the French poet says of the walrus: 'Cet animal est très méchant; quand on l'attaque—il se défend'; but *I* see no necessity for dumb toleration, do you?"

I am going ahead too fast. Long before these days, when a secret enmity was established between Mr. Clegg and the young lady, we had become intimate with the people "down below."

The first invitation was accepted with effusion, and Mr. and Mrs. Dering and Mr. Waller duly arrived to supper, and made the acquaintance of all our circle. I appropriated Jack (his full name was Lieutenant John Waller) for my own particular partner, and saw that he had the best of everything—and plenty of it.

Mr. Dering was a tall, slim, smiling young fellow, with bright dark eyes, a little stammer, and a very cheery manner. Mrs. Dering, in a smart blouse, was an ornament at our table; not as regularly handsome as Miss Rivers, but she had far more animation and sparkle, and plenty to say for herself. It was

plain that she had always lived on the sunny side of life! and even Mr. Clegg failed to talk *her* down.

"Mrs. Valdy, I must tell you," she said, "how we did enjoy your outdoor relief. I never tasted anything so toothsome as the cold chicken, and for once I went to bed and did *not* cry myself to sleep from sheer hunger."

"My dear young lady," protested Mr. Clegg, "you have never known hunger, I am sure."

"Have I not? In future I shall be far more charitable. I have had a painful lesson."

Mr. Clegg's mouth began to nibble rabbit-like, a sign that he had something to say, but he got no chance. In a few words, she painted the arrival of Anna, and her ecstasy—the revolution in the house—the present condition of the larder, and concluded her narrative by saying, "I shall now begin to enjoy myself, though I have lost three weeks."

"And I," supplemented her husband, "have lost three stone!"

We were a sociable, merry party. Dovey and Mrs. Dering became confidential; they discovered mutual acquaintances. The two officers, General and Captain, fell into professional talk of the war, army reform, musketry, and, finally, India; Mrs. Valdy and Mr. Clegg discoursed eloquently on the new fish hatchery and the latest fashionable savoury.

After supper Mrs. Dering flew over to the piano and said, "Oh, you dear thing! How glad I am to

see you. Does anyone know some Norwegian songs?"

Joan hunted out a pile of well-worn music. "But who was to play the accompaniments?"

Miss Rivers came forward with a reluctant air. She was, it soon appeared, a fine musician, whose practised hand touched the very heartstrings of her audience.

The vocalists were Mrs. Dering (who had a delicious voice), her brother, and Mr. Hopkins—who produced from his boots a wonderful bass organ. Meanwhile I sat in the window listening in rapture. Here was a change! Instead of doing nothing but talk as usual, we were enjoying a delightful concert. A crowd had assembled in the garden—the servants, the boatmen, pony boys, and neighbours—all attracted by the lovely voice of Mrs. Dering singing that fine old Norse song, "Yes, we Love this Fatherland," and the windows being open, the choruses were taken up without, and had a dramatic and impressive effect.

The only person who did not appreciate either music or the company was Mr. Clegg. He imparted to me, that "he disliked singing, especially such hideous, funereal things. It was a great mistake to go in for entertaining out here," he grumbled, "keeping all the servants and boatmen out of their beds" —and he pointed to the throng—"when we have all to be so early in the morning."

He remained ostentatiously aloof, with a little

table before him, playing "patience"; when the guests departed, we escorted them bareheaded—it being light as day—part of the way home, but Mr. Clegg remained behind, still deeply engrossed in "The Demon."

CHAPTER XI

LOG-ROLLING EXTRAORDINARY

THE weeks flitted by with incredible rapidity, although almost entirely unmarked by events, if I except the sudden death of a tame black hen (caused by heart disease—not the cook) and the smashing of Joan's pet rod. No, nothing worthy of note ever occurred. However, I must admit that one day I received an "impression"; this does not, of course, come under the head of an "event." As I strolled down to the river bank to see how Dovey was progressing with her sketch, I was surprised to discover that I had been already forestalled by another critic. Mr. Waller, who happened to be at our end of the Tor beat, had landed, leaving his boatman figuratively "champing" near the edge of their best pool, in the best water, and had come ashore—to inspect a drawing! To those with discernment it is unnecessary to add a single comment. I came upon the happy pair most unexpectedly, and to their credit, be it said, was received with a cordial and unaffected welcome. Apparently they thought

three heads were better than two, for they promptly summoned me into their counsels.

Dovey really sketched pretty well (though her trees were woolly and her clouds resembled white bags); she would draw with her imagination, and her efforts were distinctly effective. At present she was struggling to reduce to paper and Windsor paints the bend of the Rande, Tor and its tiny church.

"Now, Miss Bosworth, bear a hand—you are great at sketching," said Jack Waller; "your water-colours are A1—do advise Miss Bassett. There is a boat"—pointing—"it certainly wants a figure; there is something so vague about an empty boat; surely there should be some human interest. I have proposed myself as a model, gratis" (had he proposed himself in another capacity?). "I am willing to be put in——"

"I daresay!" said Dovey, raising her animated face, and looking at him; "and were I to put you 'in,' as you call it, perhaps you would claim the sketch."

"Perhaps," he echoed, with a laugh.

I noticed that his bones were no longer the most prominent object in his appearance—he had recovered health, spirits, and good looks. The pair were like two happy children who were on the best of terms with one another. Would it do?

"Yes," I said to myself, "it would do very well."

"If I had only a girl in Norwegian costume," said Dovey.

"She would never go on the river in her best Sunday kit," argued the sailor. "If you want a model, there is a celebrated beauty up at the top white bridge—the belle of the Randval. One of our boatmen told me of her. You ought to go up there and ask her to give you a sitting, Miss Bassett —and she wears the national dress."

"Oh, you seem to know all about her!" Dovey's tone was sharp.

"I've not seen her," he protested with unnecessary vehemence, "and I've not even talked to her on the telephone. But I hear that she sits near the bridge, knitting, and takes a personal interest in the fishing."

"Oh, really—whose fishing?" inquired Dovey.

"She is the grand-daughter of one of your men —old Lars, and poor. Her mother is a widow, and she makes a little money by weaving, and keeps cows."

"Yes—Lars' daughter—I've heard of her," I said. "He is the General's gaffer. Mrs. Valdy buys her tweed. I wonder the beauty has never been down to see us—and permit us to see her!"

"Well, if Mahomet won't go to the mountain, we will go to Mahomet," announced Dovey. "I shall walk up next Monday. Miss Bosworth, you'll come too, and we will see her and report."

"May I not join you?" said Mr. Waller boldly.

"No, indeed," rejoined Dovey with affected sternness. "*You* are here to fish, not to look at pretty girls."

"Sometimes one can do both," he retorted, with a significance and an audacity, that brought a vivid colour into the young lady's face.

He was laughing too, such a pleasant, light-hearted laugh.

"Mr. Clegg has a kodak," stammered Dovey. "He is constantly taking snapshots—let us ask him to photograph her, Miss Bosworth."

"I dare not ask him anything, he is so cross; he has not caught a fish for days, and only think, Miss Rivers brought in three yesterday morning. I assure you, when he saw them laid out on the grass, his looks were murderous—it is so amusing!"

"I believe Miss Rivers is the best fisherwoman there has been in this valley," said Mr. Waller. "So my gaffer tells me."

"Mr. Waller," I said, "suppose you come and have tea at Randval; perhaps there are—hot cakes."

"But I was just going to invite you to honour us, and I know for a fact that we have strawberries."

"No, no! I spoke first. Come, we will all get into your boat, and you can row us up."

As I watched him collecting Dovey's belongings with his capable sailor fingers, and noticed her pleased and blushing face, I once more declared to myself that "it would do."

We found tea ready—anyone who pleased made tea; first come first served—and Mr. Clegg alone writing letters. He nodded carelessly to Waller, then rose and went over to the table, deliberately poured himself out a cup, took two pieces of bread and butter, doubled them together, and devoured them standing. Before I had filled and handed cups, he had returned and carried off two more slices. The voracity with which he ate was amazing. Moreover, he had a selfish habit of taking two cups rapidly out of the teapot and filling it up with water, for the benefit of the rest of the company.

"Well, what luck?" he asked, as Joan entered.

"Oh, none! It's this horrid flood, and the river full of logs. I could hardly get my boat over."

"They are coming down pretty badly now."

"Someone on the telephone, from Tostig, for Mrs. Valdy," announced Crabbe from the doorway.

"All right—say coming."

"What sort of fishing up there?" inquired Jack Waller.

"Oh, rather wild—great rocks—and half of the river has to be done in waders. Rachel, would you like to come? I know you have a message for a shop in Trondhjem."

Together we rose and left the party—the young people, their heads together, looking over sketches, Mr. Clegg clearing the cake-plates—and walked across to Oscar's house. The telephone was wait-

ing, and presently a voice called—a young man's voice—

"Is Mrs. Valdy there?"

"Yes."

"Can you lend us a gaff?"

"Yes, certainly, if you will send down."

"We have had a misfortune with one—broke it on a log. The logs here have been awful—going down your way now."

"I'm sorry; the river is in a dreadful state, awaiting the stockmen. Have you had good sport?"

"Yes, capital for here. Thirty fish and nothing under twelve pound. And you?"

"Sixty!"

I discerned a note of triumph in that word "sixty."

"Ah! Good! You have a lot of rods, though."

"Five."

Pause.

"Will you and Lord Scarcliffe come down and dine with us on Saturday at half-past seven, no evening dress?"

Pause. Then through the tell-tale telephone we distinctly heard a gruff "Eh, what?"

"She wants us to dine there on Saturday night. Shall we accept?"

"No" (growl). "Five miles for a bad dinner, which I can get at home, and to meet a pack of ugly, weather-beaten women! No! Tell her no."

"I cannot put it quite into that shape."

Grunt. "I suppose *you'd* like to go, eh?"

"I should. But what shall I say about you?"

"Tell the widow woman I'm not such an old fool as she supposes. Tell her I don't dine out, not got a white tie. Tell her I wish she'd rent me her top pool—tell her that!"

"Are you there?" came a clear voice.

"Yes," said Joan, who was suffocated with laughing.

"I shall be delighted to dine. His lordship wishes me to say, that he greatly regrets not being able to accept, but he never dines out."

"I quite understand," said Joan briskly. "So sorry! Good-bye."

"Pray, Rachel, take warning," she remarked, "and note the dangers of the telephone."

"What an old bear!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, but not really a bad sort. A good old bear; very kind and generous to the Norwegians—hates women—never married. My top pool is a sort of Naboth's vineyard to him. He has offered for it year after year—my own price."

On Saturday we had a large party at dinner—eleven—and we were almost afraid we would have to ask the Derings to bring up their own chairs!

Sunday in Norway begins on Saturday evening at six o'clock. Then the boatmen knock off—they and the pony boys appear in sober cloth suits, flat cloth caps, with hands in pockets, and are at liberty to lounge and talk and exchange news and visits, with

all the other fishings. I scarcely recognised the active, portly Peter, accustomed to his weekday, well-turned legs in green stockings, and his brilliant fishing waistcoat, in a full suit of funeral black; nor the shabby little pony boys, in dark blue serge and overwhelming flat caps.

The Derings were our constant guests, and dined with us regularly on Saturday. Dovey and "Mrs. D." continued to be close allies, they had always much to say to one another, whilst the men talked sport. I realised that Enid Rivers was my exclusive and especial friend; and she got on remarkably well with all the other women, although on the journey over, she had scarcely opened her lips. She certainly thawed to the General, but her temperature as far as Mr. Clegg was concerned was invariably below zero. His manner was aggressive and hectoring, he constantly attacked her with questions, which she parried with amusing ease. He was also childishly jealous of her success on the river—she was actually next to the General on the sheet of paper—and she, I must confess, was more than chilly, she alternately provoked and challenged him!

Once I heard her, in answer to a whole battery of questions, say in her calm, sweet voice—

"I wonder why you are so interested in me, Mr. Clegg? when I, do not take the faintest interest in *you*."

Mr. Clegg became salmon-coloured, then he replied—and there was threat in his voice—"Perhaps

you will take an interest in me *yet*, my good young lady."

"Oh, I am *so* glad you think I am a *good* young lady!" and she gave him a smile that simply drove him out of the room.

On the day "the gentleman from up above" dined we had a most cheery gathering. Mr. Knox was an agreeable, clever-looking, clean-shaven man of thirty, and I think he was not a little astonished to find he had come among such a nice "pack of women." Evening dress was, of course, not worn, merely blouses—but there are blouses and blouses! The dinner was perfect, the table arrangements very pretty, wonderful grasses and great bowls full of the most brilliant clover blossom, flanked by heaped-up dishes of wild strawberries and bilberries.

I noticed Joan's eyes, the eye of the ruler of the feast, roving round the company with an expression of supreme content. It was all as it should be, everyone was happy in the favoured Randval Valley. Even Enid Rivers had lost her fixed, cut-out-of-card-board expression, and looked astonishingly handsome; not merely handsome, but serene, almost imperial, as she sat next to the General, and discussed their triumphs. By-and-by General Bassett, so to speak, held the stage. Neither Mrs. D. nor Mr. Clegg could get in half a word. He was relating his experience of the morning, and was neither to be interrupted nor gainsaid.

"I had the best fun to-day I ever had in my life. I hooked him in the pool just below the telephone—you know it, Hopkins?"

"And so do I," eagerly put in Miss Rivers.

"I thought he was a small fish, and tried to get him across the stream and up river, where the water is slack. I got him half-way, when he showed me that I had something worth tackling in hand. He ran out the line and jumped twice, and then began a struggle between man, fish, and logs, which I was lucky enough to win. You all know how the timber has been coming down. Well, the first log I encountered I passed my line under by putting the point of my rod well into the river. My heart stopped beating until I saw my log clear the line—then more logs came, but we got caught on the end of one. Lars rowed as hard as he could up to the trunk, which he gaffed. The gaff-hook came away from the handle and fell into the water, and there we were"—here he paused dramatically—"fast in a log, a rapid at hand, and no gaff! Lars abandoned the oars for a moment, laid hold of the stick, which luckily was a small one, freed the line, and we went sailing down the rapids to Sigard's Pool. When I got out of the boat, Lars took up a position up-stream, where with an oar he kept the timber from coming on to me whilst I manœuvred the fish—now thoroughly tired out. The bank was too steep for me to beach him, but I eventually got Lars to tail

him, which he did with his right hand, while with his left hand he embraced the salmon, much as one sees in *Punch*, where Mr. Briggs is the fishing character—and, what is more, he landed him in triumph!"

"How exciting!" exclaimed Miss Rivers. "I wish I had seen it!"

"I can't understand all the fuss you make about logs," remarked Mr. Clegg in a querulous voice. "They never bother *me* much!"

"Well, you are lucky!" cried Joan and Mr. Hopkins in a breath.

"They are dreadful," she added. "I've never known them so bad as this year."

"Because we have three winters' supply," explained the General. "Dering, I propose we all go and have a look at them after dinner. They are now on their way to you, and you may like to know what to expect."

These logs were the timbers cut in forests during the winter and, when the summer came, sent floating down the river to its mouth, taken on barges to saw-mills, at the big port, and finally shipped all over the world. But the logs *en passant* were a severe trial to fishermen, blocking the river and disturbing the fish. They lay strewn along the banks, or in great stacks where their course was arrested by rocks, and when the river was in flood, Dovey, Mrs. Dering, Miss Rivers, and even myself, sometimes spent an hour or two in working as amateur stock-

people, and moving off the logs that stranded. It was a childish amusement and really great fun, not at all so difficult once you get the knack, and it was possible to achieve a proud result with a long pole and little effort. I wondered, and I laughed as I wondered, what some of my London friends would say if they could behold me—my dress tucked up, hat on back of head, pole in hand—toiling as a lumber-woman with feverish enthusiasm.

After dinner we made a party to view the logs, and walked to a certain spot below a sharp bend of the river; here Joan, the General, Mr. Clegg, and Mr. Knox sat on the bank, and looked on, shouting directions and advice, whilst the rest of the party worked nobly. It was a fine healthy exercise, as well as a useful employment: how astonished and pleased the stockmen would be!

The fringe of logs along the shore had been coaxed and forced into mid-stream, but between two bends of the river was an enormous raft, caught on a big stone, one log arresting another as it passed, and the strong current jamming them tightly together, till there they were, accumulated in hundreds.

The ladies had been pioneers and amazingly active.

"This *is* a job for the lumbermen," cried Enid. "How I should like to see them take it to pieces."

"Do let us have a go at it," urged Mrs. Dering, full of enthusiasm, and falling-to, close by the bank, with praiseworthy effort and perseverance.

First they loosened one, then another, at last six—then came a deadlock, and the spectators, hitherto unemployed and envious, now flocked down to the great task. Each log that was released and started represented a separate triumph, and we hailed its departure with ringing cheers.

Certainly I was advancing into my second childhood, as I found myself clapping and screaming with the best!

And they made an odd group, all these young people in their good clothes, labouring so energetically, striving quite fiercely with the timber. The most daring of the women was undoubtedly Enid Rivers—she worked as if she were on a wreck saving human life (Jack Waller was, of course, in his element).

"Isn't it splendid?" she called up to me as she released one log that had long resisted her. "It is like a big game of spelicans—you move one, and you may loosen the whole thing!"

Mr. Clegg, who hitherto had been smoking a cigar, a contemptuous spectator, was now among the workers, not doing much but talk; he and Enid had differed repeatedly about their task—he insisted on moving one particular obstacle, she working hard at another. There was at last an especial log, far out on the edge of the raft, which, if it could be got rid of, would release a dozen others. It was a risky enterprise, but Enid, who was remarkably light on her feet, in spite of remonstrances from the bank,

tripped over, pole in hand, and with a quick jerk achieved her aim, and sent—oh! great moment!—five big logs rolling away into the mid-current. The river was now rising visibly and coming down fast. As she turned and looked up and nodded, I thought who would know that radiant, laughing face for the heartbroken creature of a month ago?

"*That* is no use," bawled Mr. Clegg to his rival. "It was the long brown one—a pine—that ought to have been loosened. It would free half the lot, that one at the end. Go and do it."

"No, thank you," she answered. "I doubt your skill at this particular game of spelicans."

"I bet I'll get off more than you—double the number. Come!"

"No," with a laugh, "I will not come; besides, the river is rising."

"Then I'll do it myself"; and he walked clumsily over to his pet plank.

"Oh, do be careful," cried Mrs. Valdy; "you might fall through."

"Bah! it's as tight as a house. I don't expect it'll stir before the logmen are here next week"; and certainly we all agreed with him.

He worried away at his special pine, and all eyes were fastened on him, when I happened to glance round, and noticed with alarm a sort of spate in the river—a whole fleet of huge logs coming rapidly round the corner.

"Oh, take care! Take care!" I screamed. "Come off! Come off!"

Too late! In another second they had cannoned into the raft with a long, ripping crash: the weight of a fierce flood was behind them, and the shock was such it threw Mr. Clegg on his knees; then the seemingly solid mass of wood suddenly ripped open and split into two parts; its unity had been its strength, and that was shattered. Some of the great beams seemed to momentarily rise erect out of the whirlpool, and in a second, the accumulation of weeks was scattered afar—racing down that stormy flood with Mr. Clegg shrieking and clinging to one of the timbers.

"Run! we can catch him at the bend," roared the General. "Run, Hopkins!"

Mr. Hopkins and Miss Rivers, the nearest to him, ran as for their lives, rushed down to a sharp point in the bank, and were but just in time. The log on which the wretched creature was borne struck against this promontory, and before it had time to recover its balance and revolve with the current, Mr. Hopkins and Enid had dashed at Mr. Clegg and dragged him bodily ashore between them—more dead than alive.

There was intense excitement, and the news was telephoned up and down the valley (and, for all we know, to Trondhjem and Christiania).

When the object of the adventure had recovered and sat in dry clothes, with a tumbler of hot whisky

and water in his hand, he became ridiculously elated at his experience—or perhaps it was the punch which elated him! The hero of the somewhat ignominious disaster was permitted (as a semi-invalid) to talk—and talk he did. He talked of himself as if of one who had saved the lives of the entire company, but never once alluded to Mr. Hopkins or Miss Rivers, who had been wet to the skin in effecting his salvage.

Perhaps this omission may have piqued the young lady, for during a little pause she remarked—

"Well, Mr. Clegg, you cannot boast again that the logs have never bothered *you!*"

Mr. Clegg made no reply, but I saw in his eye—which was eloquent—that he would make her pay handsomely for that unfeeling speech!

CHAPTER XII

THE AMERICAN WOMAN

THERE was now scarcely a day when we did not see "the people from down below"; either we visited them, or they came over to us; and Dovey was constantly invited by Mrs. Dering, with whom she had cemented a close friendship. On Sunday the two fishing lodges invariably dined together.

I still continued to roam abroad, admiring these fresh scenes and pastures new, and one afternoon I resolved to explore the other side of the valley; to accomplish this feat I must cross the river at some distance lower down; when I reached the ford, I discovered an old woman in a boat, who was just about to work herself over, and as I was ignorant of the mechanism of the ferry I signed to her to await me.

"You want go?" she screeched out in a cracked voice.

I nodded.

"Come, then, I take!"

I hurried down the bank and climbed into the boat, and seated myself *vis-à-vis* to my fellow-passenger.

She was a withered beldame, with faded yellow hair; she wore a woollen skirt, a black stuff body that had seen better days, and a green silk handkerchief over her head. Her boots were bad; she was the only untidy old woman I had as yet encountered —but a wonderful woman to work a boat.

Undoubtedly my companion was poor. Though not in rags—rags or beggars I never saw in Norway, the community are all most self-respecting and well shod—there was something in my companion's haggard countenance, wrinkled arms, and bony hands, that seemed to tell of a long and terrible battle with the wolf—Want.

"You belong there?" she said, nodding up the river; "there I sell my eggs and knitting."

"Yes," I assented. "How well you speak English."

"No, not now. Once I was servant at that house," and she pointed to the Derings' abode, a mile distant.

As we neared the other side I fumbled for my purse; it only contained a ten-kroner note and a few ore pieces. When we reached land I sprang out, and offered her, rather timidly, the smaller coins.

These she looked at for a moment, seemed to hesitate, finally accepted, and, as the usual sequence, shook hands. Our road lay straight before us, and we continued for some time, side by side, along a pretty footpath and by some farms. I was making

for the mountain, there to sketch a certain small lake and large waterfall, when all at once a sudden gust of cold wind, heralded a great black cloud, which came sweeping up the valley: it was undoubtedly going to pour, and I had no umbrella. As we neared a solitary shabby old house, standing among a patch of barley, weeds, and grass, the drops fell rapidly; my companion made for the shelter, and I followed her. It appeared as we reached the door, that it was her home.

"You come in," she said abruptly, and I most gladly entered.

First there was a little hall, from which ascended a ladder-like stair, and out of which opened several doors; one of these admitted us into a great bare kitchen, with an iron stove. It contained a long table, two forms, a bread trough, a dresser with white china, and a top-heavy old painted clock. On the stove stood a teapot. The whole place was beautifully clean, but so bare that it made me feel chilly.

"This is where I live," she announced; "I live these forty years."

"Alone—by yourself?"

"Oh, yes—all alone." The sudden pushing back of a chair overhead seemed to give an instant denial to the statement. Her old face coloured as she added, "At present I am not alone."

She seemed to be embarrassed, nervous, and listen-

ing anxiously for further sounds. Why? Who was above? Did she keep a lunatic upstairs? I would soon know. I heard a door slammed, and the sound of shoes and a rustling of skirts coming down the ladder. Then the door handle was jerked, and a tall, well-dressed woman—the—yes, the American woman —stood in the entrance.

As her granite-grey eyes fell on me, she turned painfully red, and paused, undecided what to do—to fly or to remain? She at last said something sharp to the old woman in Norwegian, who, instead of answering, turned to me and explained.

"This is my datter—she has come from America to see me after eighteen years; it was too long, or she had forgotten—everything seems changed, and she is not happy, no."

"I'm afraid I have intruded," I faltered. "I am very sorry, but your mother brought me over in the ferry, and I came in here to shelter from the shower."

"Oh, well, never mind—no matter," she answered. "I remember you on the steamer with Mrs. Valdy, and I'm real glad you came in—it is a treat to see someone like the folk I'm used to. My mother has been to the store for sugar and a few things; come into my room, and we will have tea right away."

As I hesitated, she added: "Come, if you please, or I'll think you are too proud."

It was impossible to withstand this appeal. I nodded my head and followed her into a room opposite the kitchen—the state parlour. Here the walls were painted flesh colour, the boards were bare; there were tables, chairs, a dower chest, opposite the door a crude yellow press ornamented in bright green. In each corner of the room stood a table covered with a white cloth—on one a tea-set, several teapots, and some blue glass tumblers; on another a pair of vases, a silk scarf, and a pair of gloves (evidently the family treasures); on a chest of drawers were several photographic groups, and some pinned on the wall—soldiers in uniform and parsons in white ruffs; four chairs were ranged together two and two, the seats carefully covered with white cloths. Everything denoted extreme cleanliness, poverty, and care.

"Sit down," said the woman, snatching a cloth off a chair, "and while mother boils the kettle I will tell you all about it."

I accepted the seat, and she began impetuously, still standing.

"You see, it was like this! Eighteen years back there were awful bad times in this valley, the hay crop failed, and folks were just clemmed, they had to kill the cattle. Father had an old friend in America, who wrote and said if he would send me out he would see I got a good place, and maybe do well. I was only nineteen, with ropes of golden hair,

and very fair and good-looking—as our people are before hardship begins to eat into their bones. I had friends in the valley I used to meet at the dances at the dance-house and up the mountains in summer, at the Sæters, and I was set on the Randval—and to go just broke my heart. Still, I went, and had an awful rough journey, for I travelled cheap; and when I got out there I soon took hold and worked hard, and learnt English, to wait at table and dress myself, but I was dead homesick. However, by-and-by I got over that. I had a great many offers of marriage, for I, as you may suppose, was well-looking, and not a giddy sort of girl. At last I took a settler from out west, a man doing a real smart business. He was inclined to look for money, and I had none; but I had looks, and character, and —that money cannot buy, as I told him—my father's folk had been on their own land for five hundred years—farmers, wealthy farmers, and as he was the son of a common field hand, he was struck! So we got married. I did well. Sandy is a clever man and rich, but must *see* what he spends. We kept a bar, and I had fine clothes, and rings, and a coloured help, and a buggy, but no loose cash—no pocket-money—not a nickel to send home. He believed my folk were very well-to-do, and all I could squeeze was a few dollars, and some of my clothes—there's my presents." She paused, breathless, and we involuntarily looked at the table, loaded with

cheap ornaments. "Of course I explained; but my mother could not understand how it was that I sent my photograph in furs and feathers, and real grand, and a picture of my horse and buggy, and never sent home more than a few dollars to help—even when my father was sick and the pony died. Well, I did my best, for Sandy looked over all my bills and paid them himself. After a while I began to think of coming back. I always had it before me—the river, the pine trees, and the valley, my mother, and the fishing—it took a terrible hold of me. I spoke to Sandy, but he put me off every year. However, this summer I got him to agree; he wanted to come too, and see my home and people. Of course, that would never do, and I managed with a heap of trouble to persuade him to stay behind, and he gave me my passage money, and I came over on a return ticket, full of joy." Here she stopped, sat down suddenly, and began to sob—hard, dry sobs.

"And it is all so different to what I expected," she resumed breathlessly, "and I am so different to what folk expected. When I drove up in the *sassvogn* my mother was just struck. She took me for one of the ladies from Tor till I spoke, and then she was not sure till I took off my hat—for eighteen years and another sort of dress, make a change in anyone!"

To this I agreed with a nod.

"Ye see, I had gone away a bareheaded girl, with

thick yellow plaits, and a skirt and warm shawl, and I came back like a lady. At first we were full of thankfulness, and just sat on a kitchen form, rocking together and kissing and crying, and talking of all that had come and gone and the changes since I went away." She paused for a second, and a slight tremor passed over her face.

"But soon I began to feel what a poor sort of home I'd come to—not a mite of meat or a pinch of tea, only salt fish and dry barley bread, and the bed so hard, and not half long enough to stretch in. After the first few days, when I saw what home was, I declare I cried myself silly."

"You were so unhappy and disappointed?"

"Yes, and so angry with myself for feeling so discouraged. Things I once thought splendid, like that old painted press, and the blue tumblers, now were hideous; even the valley seemed smaller, and the people hateful!"

"What!" I ejaculated; "surely the people were the same?"

"Yes, I'm telling you everything straight, for if I don't speak out my feelings to someone, I shall burst. You see, I've lived in another country, speaking another tongue, for eighteen years, and I kinder belong to that country. I come here—what I've been pining for—and, like the apples in the Bible, it all turns to ashes and dust in my mouth. I've not met a soul to speak to in English for four weeks, and

now I meet you I must just relieve my heart or have an illness." She really looked quite haggard, her cheeks were white and sunken. "I know I am making an awful show of myself," she added; "but I cannot help it, even if you despise me."

"But I don't despise you," I declared. "I am truly sorry for you—you expected too much; it is a way we all have."

"Yes, I was too proud and grand, and I've been sorely punished. I thought when I came back, with all my clothes, and hats, and rings, and brooches, that I would make a fine show-off—but who could show off in this old barn?—and that all the people I knew here would make a fuss over me, and treat me as a great lady. It's an awful mean way of looking at things, but I can't help my nature, and that's all there is, to it!"

"No."

"Well, the folks were real ugly to me when I went down to church—we have a minister here every third Sunday—they crowded up around me and shook hands, and stared and asked questions, and some came to see me, and turned over my frocks and things, and said: 'It were better to put the money in *cows* or in the bank, and that it was foolish.' I was asked to a party at Johan's; he has a very big farm near the 'creamery,' and I wore all my best clothes —a silk waist and silk skirt, and a hat that cost twenty-five dollars. We had only just cocoa and

cake, and they all talked—the women—and stared and giggled; some of them went to school with me, but by-and-by I saw they were not listening to what I was telling them about the States, they were far more taken up with a new farmhouse that Britte's husband was building, and the chances of a good hay crop! I guess I was just a foreign woman; and as for my smart clothes, they made fun of them, and said I was a silly owl to wear such things in the valley, and that I had forgotten my own tongue. Then my mother was disappointed I had not brought home more money. I brought what I could, God knows!"

"Yes, I am sure you did," I assented.

"It was just enough to pay her debt to the shop. She had a bill owing three years."

"Then they give long credit in the valley?"

"It's like this. She pays a bit when she can; in summer with her eggs and knitting and a piece of tweed; and so they let it run on. Karl is a kind man, and she does not eat much. A little coffee and a little barley and some oil and matches is all she wants. Of course, I paid it up, but I'm left real short; I've hardly enough to take me to the steamer, and we are awfully pinched, and it's *my* fault."

I looked at her interrogatively.

"You see, I told Sandy a lie at the first start, and that lie has been chasing me ever since. It was true

we were here four centuries, but it was not true that we were rich. He is a sober sort of man, and can't understand people not speaking the truth. If he knew I'd told him that lie, he'd never forgive me. And it's between my mother starving, and my husband despising me, that I stand now."

"You should tell him—better late than never."

"Yes, but even then, when he knows, it won't do me any good, for my mother feels real badly towards me. She has no love for me; I am a stranger, with strange ways. She'd ten times rather have the woman in the next farm; she is her friend, and has been so since they went to school, and has come to her always in her troubles. And it does seem wicked when I look at mother—her hands all seamed and worn, and mine so white, with diamond rings; it's like our two lives. And yet I vow, I'd no notion things were like this"—looking round—"I thought my father had some money put up, and that my brother helped; but he is married, and has his own family around. He is in a fish-curing business at Trondhjem. And it seems, though mother never said a word when she wrote, that they were all looking to *me!*"

The door was opened quietly, and the old woman shuffled in carrying a teapot and two cups, which she set on a table near the window, then she brought in some sugar and a milk-jug.

Her daughter whispered something to her, but she only shook her head and went out speechless.

"There it is," she declared. "Mother won't stay with us, and do you know that all day long we scarcely meet. I sit up above, and she sits down below, and I believe we are each doing the very same thing—counting the days till we part; isn't it *awful?*"

"But have you quarrelled?"

"Well, yes, we have; each time we speak we disagree. Mother always had a sharp tongue; she talks, and does not spare me. It does no manner of good, but it is terrible. She tells of my father's sickness, and how he wanted food, but he would never let her tell me—he was so proud. He said God had punished him for sending me away, hoping I would do well, and come back with pockets full of gold. I had the pockets full of gold—and I *kept* it."

"When do you return?" I asked, as I accepted a cup of tea.

"In three weeks' time—the days are weeks."

"Do you never go out?"

"Only late at night, when all the valley has retired to bed. Of course, it is broad daylight, and I walk a long way to look at the old places. I've even been up on the mountain to a *sæter* where I spent three summers; it was just the same, and as I sat on the doorstep and looked down on the view, it might

have been as if I had but left the place an hour, yet, oh! what changes since I sat there last, crying my eyes out because I was to go to America."

"But why don't you associate with your old friends?"

"They will not associate with me—they think I am silly, they make fun of my clothes, they say my jewellery is glass; that if *I* am so rich, why is my mother so poor? and they all despise me. Now, you see what reason I have to be unhappy."

"Yes. You will send your mother help, I am sure, when you go home; that will be a comfort. I wish I could do something for you now."

"Well you can," she said, with unexpected emphasis. "It has been such a relief to pour out my heart to you to-day, to hear the English tongue. May I go up to the lodge and see you, and borrow a book or some papers?"

"Certainly," I answered; "I shall be very glad if you will."

"Oh, you have no idea what it is sitting alone and brooding, and having nothing to do. I would like to have done some weaving, but my mother would not allow it. She says I am a *lady!* At what time shall I find you in?"

"At any hour between four and seven."

"Thank you. I shall go to see you only, Mrs. Valdy will not be anxious to know the daughter of old Britte."

"But why not? Of course she will. And now it has cleared, and I must be going."

As she stood up before me—with her neat linen gown, her carefully dressed hair, her earrings, her little watch—she seemed certainly an incongruous figure in that old log-house, overlooking a ragged patch of barley, and a great sun-bleached barn.

Mrs. Slodder said good-bye to me in the doorway and hastily hurried within, I believe to cry. Outside her old mother was chopping wood; she scarcely raised her head as I said "Good afternoon," but nodded shortly; it seemed to me that there was a curious, repellent glance in her inflexible old eyes.

By this time it was too late to proceed further, and I turned away in the direction of the ferry. I had come out to sketch a landscape, and I was carrying back with me a vivid picture of "an interior."

I duly related the afternoon's experiences to Joan. I generally visited her, and had a talk in her room, before we went to bed.

"Oh, old Britte's daughter!" she exclaimed, as she brushed out her thick reddish hair. "Yes, I've heard of her. Fancy her being that good-looking passenger whom I chaperoned at Bergen. She had no idea then that her mother was my egg-woman, or that I lived in this part of the world. Well, I hope she will come and look us up. I should like to see

her. There's many a romance in this valley, if one only knew and had time to study it, Rachel. You are a female Christopher Columbus, with your discoveries—first the starving Derings, and now the American emigrant."

CHAPTER XIII

A DIAMOND BROOCH

VERY frequently the Derings and Mr. Knox met at Randval for tea. I do not think Mr. Clegg approved—nor perhaps even the General and Mr. Hopkins: they contemplated these gatherings with mild disfavour, not from inhospitable motives, but that they were unbusinesslike proceedings, a frivolous trifling with precious time and with the solemn sport of salmon fishing. All the same, these gentlemen were invariably present, for there was no fishing between three and six o'clock—boatmen are but mortals.

As we sat out under the cherry and birch trees in the garden we were a most congenial party, and a merry party too, although we had recently been listening to a tale of woe, and how his lordship of Scarcliffe had nearly been drowned the previous day.

"You know," explained Mr. Knox, "ours is partly a wading river; there is capital sport among the rocks and pools, and his lordship, though an old man,

enjoys standing up to his waist in running water. Of course, he wears waders and—what I always told him was such a mistake—a belt; for, you see, in case of an accident, with air in the waders, down goes his head, up goes his heels, which are light. Yesterday, by a mere chance I went up to his pool with a telegram; I saw him in the river, and then again I looked, I saw him not! I ran as hard as I could; there was a boat and a line, and a tremendous commotion on the surface of the water; I tore off my coat and dived in, and subsequently gaffed and landed his lordship! I tell you it was a near thing. He was most awfully done. It seems he had suddenly stepped back, the hole was about four feet deeper, and away he went, head under. He says the sensation was horrible—struggling, with his legs floating on top, so to speak, and powerless, and he was so vexed that he lost the fish."

"On the other hand, he saved his life, or, rather, you saved it for him," said Mr. Dering. "What is he going to give you besides the Humane Society's medal?"

"Nothing—not even the satisfaction of saying, 'I told you so!' He still sticks to the belt."

"I've always heard that he was the soul of tenacity," said the General, "and after all, he's what's called a 'belted earl'!"

And now an argument began to rage respecting the use of belts with waders, or otherwise. It waxed animated, and Mr. Knox was declaring, with some

asperity, "Well, all *I've* to say is that I've known a man who was *drowned*." Then, with an abrupt change of key, he added, "Hullo! Who is this?"

We looked, and there, coming along the little drive, an elegant figure was approaching, wearing a neat grey canvas gown and carrying a real blue silk umbrella—it was Britte's daughter. When she beheld the gathering she hesitated and came to a standstill; but I hastened to the little gate and invited her to join us.

Amazement was depicted on several faces. Who was she? From whence came this fashionable stranger? Had she dropped from the clouds—or a motor?

Joan rose to receive her, and offered her a chair and tea.

The visitor glanced doubtfully at me and coloured deeply, but instantly recovered herself and accepted the situation with amazing self-possession.

"This is Mrs. Slodder, who came over with us in the *Dagmar*," explained Joan, addressing Mrs. Dering.

"Is this your first visit to Norway?" inquired the young lady.

"Oh no; I was born here," she answered, "but I live now in America, this many years."

"A most interesting and amazing country," remarked Mr. Clegg, who, having disposed of four cups of tea and a plate of bread and butter, felt at liberty to entertain the visitor.

As she was a handsome, well-dressed woman, he laid himself out to be agreeable, and Britte's daughter was nothing loth; it afforded her unaffected pleasure to re-enter a circle of English-speaking people—to feel herself welcomed, appreciated, admired. She was undoubtedly good-looking in a somewhat hard Scandinavian style. I noticed Mr. Clegg's little greenish eyes travelling over her and noting the diamond brooch, also her rings—when she removed her gloves. They were talking of the New York theatres and the magazines, and were floating along on a brisk conversational current, whilst Miss Rivers and Mr. Jack Waller were busily comparing fly-books.

"Come! do let us do a deal," I heard him urge. "How much for that little one with the yellow wings?"

"Nothing you can offer—it is my lucky fly. I have caught five fish on it."

It was seldom Miss Rivers talked to men; she generally held herself aloof from Mr. Waller and Mr. Hopkins. With the General she was friendly, but between her and Mr. Clegg was an antagonism that was evident to the meanest intelligence.

"What about the folk at the mouth of the river?" inquired Mr. Knox. "What have they been doing? Have you heard, Mrs. Valdy?"

"I do not know," replied Joan, "and what is more, I do not care."

"Oh, it's a feud," cried Mr. Knox; "a fish feud—a frontier war!"

"No, nothing half so dramatic. I don't think the Guises do much fishing; they play the banjo and bridge."

"Guise, did you say?" cried Mr. Clegg excitedly. "I know them; Lady G. and I are tremendous pals. I'd no idea they were in the valley; are you sure?"

"Yes, we came out with them. And they tried to take my launch. We are not on smiling terms!"

"I must go down and call; I'll telephone and fix a day. Lady Guise is sure to have a house full and lots of news. Do you know her, Miss Bosworth?"

"No, except that I saw her on board ship and we talked a little about the weather."

At this moment Margarette (Crabbe's understudy) came to carry off the tea-tray. When she caught sight of Mrs. Slodder, she paused, stared, and said something in Norwegian, and further discomfited her by shaking her heartily by the hand. Then Margarette (an old servant who had been with Mrs. Valdy since her first season) turned to us and said in English: "It is only Kari, of Tor; twenty years ago we went to school together. She has never been up to see me, and I've not had time to go and see her."

Mrs. Slodder, *née* Kari, of Tor, looked extremely confused, but she laughed and muttered something in a quick undertone to Margarette, who, with a sharp, brisk reply, hastily collected the tea-tray and departed indoors.

Mr. Clegg was not entirely satisfied with the status

of his companion; his conversation flagged; presently he got up and stalked stiffly away, and I immediately took his chair, and said, "Would you care to walk round the place, or shall we go into the house?"

"Yes, I would like to look around indoors; I've not been here since I was a child."

As we strolled in together she added: "I used to come here selling wild strawberries, and glad to get ten ore for a morning's hard work. Over the valley there"—and, with her hand shimmering with rings, she pointed—"was the best place."

"And how are you getting on?" I inquired. "Have any of your old friends been to see you?"

"Only one—Erik Petersen." And she heaved a profound sigh. "Long ago we were on the *sæters* together—boy and girl—and I don't mind telling you—that we loved one another." As she spoke her hard blue eyes softened. "Erik was real handsome, as straight as a pine tree, and as active as—as a squirrel; and his singing—well, it was beyond anything—the very cattle stood to listen. But after that terrible winter, when we nearly starved, I was forced to go to America, for there was no food at home, and Erik had no money. He married a woman with a farm, years older than himself. Well, he came to see me, awfully changed and bent—you'd take him to be fifty; I just knew him by his eyes. He sat for a good spell, a couple of hours, and talked. Oh, it was

like opening a door and looking straight back into one's youth!"

"What a delightful thing to do!" I exclaimed. "No one comes to me with the key of my young days."

"It won't happen to me again, and that's sure," she said forcibly; "I knew his wife Indry, and I don't want to have *her* fingers in my hair!"

"And how is your mother?" I inquired; "is she kinder and more like her former self?"

"Oh, just the same," and she heaved a sigh. "Mother was vexed that I talked to you. 'What,' she says, 'does the Englisher want to know of our lives?' I stole out to-day without her knowing, and I hoped to find you alone, for I'm aware all the other people fish, but I came upon such a crowd I felt right down flustered. I want to ask you to do something, and I would not venture"—she paused—"only people say—you know how everything is known—that you are rich—the richest woman in the valley!"

"I am well off, certainly," I admitted. "I have money; it does not make me any happier."

"Oh, how happy it would make some! Well, see now, this diamond brooch; it cost Sandy a pile—five hundred dollars; he gave it to me when we were seven years married. Will you buy it for half its value? I want to leave the money with my mother; how can I let her face the winter with only a few kroner?"

Here was a most unexpected request. I did not want a diamond brooch, and yet I desired to help her with all my heart.

"I will gladly lend you some money, if you like; how much?"

"Fifty pounds—one thousand kroner. I can get a cheque on London cashed in the valley at the saw-mills. I will walk down there myself."

"Very well; as you please."

"But you must take the brooch," she continued, unfastening it as she spoke with feverish haste. "I cannot borrow otherwise. No."

"But I don't want it, I do assure you."

"Why, what's the matter with it? Isn't it fine enough? But I guess you are no business woman. I tell you this, you are not going to advance fifty pounds to a stranger on no security. No, no; you will take this brooch, and when I can fix up things I will redeem it."

As I realised that she was determined, I assented. "My writing-case is here, and I will give you the cheque at once."

"Thank you," she said, "it will be a great favour, and for fifty pounds, I shall not feel so—bad!"

"There it is," I said, when I had scribbled and blotted the cheque.

"Please give me your address on a piece of paper."

I handed her a pencil, and I hunted out one of my visiting cards, which I put into an envelope along

with the money. "You can always find me, if you ever want the brooch again, and I will keep it safely."

"Thank you a thousand times," she said, stooping to kiss my hand; "it was a lucky shower that sent you to *me!*"

Then straightening herself, and looking round the drawing-room, she drew a long breath, and said, "Ah, I remember it all so well, and it used to seem to me as a palace, when I waited on the steps outside and peeped in; and there they are all on the verandah now," she exclaimed. "I shall feel real shy passing them."

"I will pilot you safely," I said, as I opened the door, and we stepped out into a crowd who were all gathered together round a figure seated on the step —an old bent woman, who had brought for sale a rather good and unusually possible piece of tweed. She crouched with her hands folded and her head down, whilst Mrs. Valdy measured and talked and explained to Mr. Knox and Mr. Dering, who had each consented to purchase a suit.

"We had better take the whole piece between us; it's not too much, only thirty-five what they call *ollen*."

"The old woman wants the money badly—she wishes to pay for her haycutting."

"Yes, she really does look poor," added Miss Rivers; "if they won't buy it, it will make a fishing frock for me."

The piece was examined, the money paid, and the circle now made room for Mrs. Slodder as a possible customer. I glanced down at the old woman. Surely I recognised the faded green handkerchief? Yes, it was Britte come secretly to dispose of her stuff when her stylish daughter was from home. What a dramatic situation! The bent, poverty-stricken peasant—too humble to even raise her eyes to the crowd, among which stood her own fine upstanding Kari, the best-dressed woman in the group.

She made no attempt at recognition; perhaps Margarette might have enlightened the party.—I saw Kari's face become scarlet, then white, as she moved forward and said something in Norwegian, and then to all of us, in a queer strained voice: "This is my mother, Britte, of Tor; I am real thankful to the gentlemen who have bought her stuff. Come!" and she held out her hand to her parent with a gesture that was imperative. Old Britte looked up incredulously, took it unresistingly, and rose stiffly to her feet. She stood for a moment, and then shook hands in turn with her customers with silent solemnity, and, resigning herself to her daughter's company, trudged away with her down the path to the bridge.

At first no one spoke, and then Mrs. Dering cried, "Surely *she* is not the daughter of old Britte? Why, look at them!"

They certainly presented a strange contrast—the

shabby, shuffling old Norwegian, the upright, fashionable figure. At last Mrs. Dering said—

"It is some hoax—someone playing the fool."

"No, it is all right," explained Joan. "It occasionally happens that the girls who go to America return to their old haunts."

"If they bring nothing with them but fine feathers," said Mrs. Dering indignantly, "they had better stay away."

I thought of the diamond brooch, and said, "You must not always judge by appearances. Kari does what she can, I know."

"She is a fine-looking woman," said Mr. Waller, "and looks as if she were well bred."

"Yes, she has rare old Scandinavian blood in her veins, no doubt. Half the people here, poorly as they live, have famous pedigrees."

"They ought to make a good thing out of *them* in the States," sneered Mr. Clegg; and presently we all dispersed.

A few days later, I was writing for the mail in the drawing-room when Miss Rivers came over and asked me for a pen-nib. As I searched for it, her eye fell upon something sparkling in my despatch-box.

"Why, I declare!" she exclaimed, then paused. "I was going to say, that was the American woman's brooch."

"Yes, it is," I assented, with a smile. "You may say on."

"How?" Then again she curbed her curiosity.

The occasion was undoubtedly provocative; but as I had never questioned Enid Rivers, she naturally felt bound to respect my little mysteries.

"Thereby hangs a tale!" and she laughed.

"Yes," I replied; "a tale of two hemispheres."

CHAPTER XIV

THE BEAUTY AT THE BRIDGE

"SOME day I shall go up to the top water and interview the beauty who sits on the bridge," I announced to the general company.

"It's a long, fagging walk," remonstrated Mr. Hopkins; "you'll never do it between breakfast and lunch."

"Well, then, I shall take my lunch with me," I answered. "Time is no object to me! A picnic—not to a beautiful spot, but to a spot where beauty sits."

"She is not often there," he objected.

Why was Mr. Hopkins determined that I was not to see her? A cold suspicion crept into my mind. I now recalled the fact, that the top beat—said to be the worst of the whole fishing—was not in keen demand; people thought it most good and unselfish of Toby Hopkins to take it so often out of his right turn. He liked it, he declared—"it was a rough sporting bit of water"—and he was suffered to enjoy it without remonstrance. No one had ever connected his partiality for the far beat, with the

pretty girl at the bridge. It remained for me to do so!

"Have you ever seen the reputed beauty?" I said to Joan.

"No, not since she was a child. Her mother comes down here occasionally with stuff, which they both weave; she is very particular about the girl—won't ever let her go to a *sæter* or do hard work. People say that Ingeborge is proud, because she married an Englishman—a gentleman, too."

"Oh, really! Where is he?" I inquired.

"In England presumably; or heaven. And she is poor, but she has always kept Marli neatly dressed; as a small child she was a picture. Marli must now be about seventeen."

"Oh, she looks older than that," remarked Miss Rivers.

"What is she like?"

"Still a picture, and perfectly charming; she embodies my idea of the Lorelei on the Rhine; fair, with dark blue eyes, wonderful flaxen hair, beautiful features, and such a dimple!"

"I don't believe the Lorelei had a dimple," objected the General, "and I don't admire her—her hair wants brushing! She is just a pretty wax doll."

I noticed Mr. Hopkins colour furiously, and Joan said, "I must appoint a commission of ladies to report on the beauty—Miss Bosworth, Miss Bassett, and Mrs. Dering."

"I say, it's rather a shame to ridicule the poor girl," expostulated our usually silent Toby Hopkins.

"Pray what is the story of her mother's marriage?" I asked. "It may be another valley romance."

"I can't tell you; it happened before we came. Ingeborge was very pretty, and went from here to England with a lady as a maid. In London she met with a good-for-nothing young scamp, who married her. She returned home two years afterwards with her little girl, an infant. I heard she had led a most wretched life, and thankfully escaped to her own country. Such is the tale."

"Of course she has an English name?"

"Yes—Sherwood, but she is not known by it; she is simply Ingeborge, and Marli is Ingeborge's daughter. She was a belle in her day, and no doubt could have married a farmer, if she had not been a little ambitious."

"Marli lives in a picturesque log-house near the water-mill," added Miss Rivers, "and she wears the national dress; it suits her to perfection. She has lovely hair, though the wind does toss it about; every time I go up there she is sitting on the bank or the bridge knitting. It is extraordinary, the interest she takes in the fishing."

The very next morning I secured my lunch and started off to the top beat; it was a walk of four long miles, but through beautiful scenery, and the road was flat and winding. I descried the General casting

with his usual intentness, and stopped to inquire "Any sport?" I passed through a little village, where the sole inhabitant I encountered was a big sort of Esquimaux dog lying in the road in a condition of well-fed contemplativeness. He did not move an inch, but merely thumped his tail in salutation.

After a considerable tramp I came in sight of the white wooden bridge crossing a wild, mountain river that pours itself over a bed of rocks at right angles with the Rande; and below, sitting on a bank, I observed a black and gold skirt, a red bodice, a fair head, and immediately climbed down in order to join this figure.

An astonished but lovely face was raised to mine as the girl heard me approaching; she sat still and watched me with great, serious eyes—and Marli really was beautiful. I speak as a judge; I have seen many lovely women as I've rambled about the world—American, English, Irish, French, Austrian—but never a more exquisite creature than this little Norwegian maiden sitting beside the Rande river. It was a beauty that was a possession—that a painter would rave over. Was she fated to be the bride of some hard-featured peasant? or was her fame to go far, and to delight other worlds?

"Good day," I said in Norwegian, advancing. "I have come a long distance—all the way from the big house."

She coloured to the roots of her hair, and I added, "Do you understand English?"

"Oh yes, a little."

"I wanted to see this end of the fishing," I resumed, "and so I walked, but I brought my lunch to eat here."

As I spoke I seated myself not far from her.

"It is very pretty?" I remarked, "is it not?"

"Oh yes, I love the river."

"I believe you often come here?"

"Yes, it is so dull at home, and my mother likes me to get the air and sun; for in winter we are shut in for so long."

"Is the snow heavy?"

"Oh yes, sometimes so thick it falls we cannot even see the cow-shed, and it is half-way up the windows. We live there"—and she pointed to a large two-storied house, with the usual barn and well—"with my grandfather."

"And the river is frozen?"

"Oh yes, many yards deep."

"How nicely you knit," I said; "may I see?"

She handed me a sock for inspection.

"You sell them, don't you?"

"Oh yes, but these are sold; twelve pair just like this."

I examined the sock, it was a large size; it would fit Mr. Hopkins.

"You have got a good order, then?"

"Oh yes," resuming her sock; "I also do gloves."

"I should like you to make me a couple of pairs. Will you?"

"I will indeed. They are one kroner and a half each," she added in a businesslike tone. "White or coloured?"

"White, I think. Our hands are about the same size."

I noticed that hers were particularly small and well kept, like those of a young lady.

"You do not often have a chance of speaking English," I remarked, "do you? And yet you speak so nicely."

Again she coloured, and replied—

"I talk English a good deal with my mother, and I read it also. I like English books."

"Indeed?"

"You know my father was English, but he was not a good man; my mother was very unhappy in your country," and she surveyed me with a pair of reproachful eyes.

"I am sorry to hear that."

Here I opened my parcel—ham sandwiches, ginger nuts, a flask of claret and water, and I spread them on a flat stone.

"Will you accept one of these sandwiches?" I said, offering the paper.

"Thank you," she murmured, taking one daintily and biting it with her perfect little teeth.

"You have never eaten a ham sandwich before, I am sure?"

"Oh yes, I have—several times," she answered unguardedly, and then she stopped, but, alas! too late; the cat was out of the bag! she had undoubtedly been sharing the lunch of Toby Hopkins. I happened to know that the General never ate lunch, and Mr. Clegg was far too greedy to spare her a crumb—no, not were she Venus herself! There remained but Mr. Hopkins; and now it was abundantly evident to me, why he so often was so kind and unselfish as to fish the top beat.

Was he in love with this exquisite Northern flower? Possibly she presented such an acute contrast to the hordes of girls of all ages, who had chased him for his money.

This ignorant little creature had never heard of his thousands. She did not know that he was rich—only that he was good and kind to her; he gave her sandwiches and orders for socks, and once a big salmon which he sent to her mother. Could this simple-minded, blue-eyed child of nature be waiting for him now? Had she any idea that, sitting so quietly on the river bank, she had hooked and landed a very big fish?

"What do you do with yourself all day?" I inquired.

"Oh, I weave and I milk—we have three cows. Mother cooks and weaves and goes to the shop. I

help to make hay when it is cut, and I read and sew——"

"What do you read?"

"The papers—the *Lansblabet*, three days old, a farmer lends it; and we have books; now and then I buy some in Trondhjem."

"Stories?"

"Yes—Ibsen and Björnsen and history."

"And for amusement?"

"There are nice dances in the big barn, and now and then at the dance-house, and I go; and there are picnics in the forests in the long evenings—we go up and make a fire, and have a feast; or sometimes I climb to the big lakes on the top of the mountain, and fish for trout with other girls."

"How do you like these biscuits?" I asked, holding her out two.

"Oh!"—(nibbling)—"so good—so good!"—these, at least, were undoubtedly a novelty—"but I am ashamed of eating your lunch."

"No, no—and it is very nice for me to have someone to share it with. I have brought an English magazine—would you care to look at it?"

"Oh yes, I do love books and pictures!"

We opened it together and pored over it. I explained various illustrations to her, and she listened with an interest that was more than flattering—it was pathetic.

Thus intensely absorbed, we had not heard the

sound of oars, nor noticed that someone was in our vicinity.

I raised my head, and was confronted by Mr. Hopkins, who was standing in the boat beneath us and viewing my proximity to Marli with eyes of incredulous displeasure. The acquaintance I had made with the beauty of the bridge, was not agreeable to her patron; a single glance was sufficient to assure me of this fact. He was, I felt convinced, inwardly saying, "Detestable, prying old maid! What the devil is she doing up here?" But aloud he merely exclaimed—

"Hullo, Miss Bosworth, fancy *you* finding your way here! So you and Marli have made friends?"

"Oh, yes," I answered, "we have broken bread together, and shared the same lunch. She tells me" —and I looked him squarely in the face—"that she is very fond of—sandwiches."

Toby Hopkins reddened and said, "Oh, is she?" and gave me a glowering glance that signified that I had fallen fathoms five in his estimation! I had done worse than poach upon his stretch of the river. I was making fun of him, and engrossing the society of his particular friend.

"Any sport?" I inquired.

"No," he answered doggedly. "This is a bad day."

"I am rather stiff from sitting," I remarked, after a

long and significant pause, and then rose to my feet with Toby's assistance, and having presented the magazine to Marli, with cordial hand-shakes and farewells, took myself off, being sensible of the fact that I was "one too many."

CHAPTER XV

AN UNEXPECTED ESCORT

AS soon as I had completed a recognisable sketch of the old mill—with its great brown wheel, and the water tumbling from rocks above and below it—I collected my belongings and turned my face homewards. How I wish I could convey some faint idea of the prospect on which my eyes rested as I descended the "Happy Valley." The sky was cloudless, a soft turquoise blue; from where I stood I could follow the windings of the Rande for miles. Through the smooth green pastures that capricious river twisted like a silver ribbon—now close to one mountain, again embracing the opposite shore, forming islands, back waters, rapids, according to its erratic fancy. Encompassing hills (spurs of great ranges) were clothed with forests of pine, ash, and birch, the trees here and there laced together by graceful festoons of wild hops. The impressive stillness of these woods was broken by the thunder of cataracts leaping from the upland plains, and precipitating themselves headlong into the reckless Rande.

My route lay within a stone's-throw of the water; to the left were exquisite ravines, thickets of fern, banks starred with wild heartsease, gigantic clumps of spirea and foxglove, and bushes of blooming dog-roses.

At a certain point I came to a standstill, and endeavoured to imprint this exquisite landscape on my memory. I was successful, for I can see the picture now: the purple mountains thrusting into the water their imperial forms, but to be driven back by the wild excitable river, yes, as long as she existed they and their kindred should never join hands. The flowers and grasses of the lower slopes and valley resembled in colour a wide-spreading Eastern carpet, with splashes of crimson, yellow, and white; beyond one bend, a dazzling mass of butter-cups, flashed the water a vivid blue, and what a brilliant sight! it looked as if the Rande had crowned herself with gold. Having feasted my eyes for a considerable time, I turned my thoughts and my steps homewards, and as I glanced down the road I noticed a figure approaching—the figure of a man. A fisherman? No. A Norwegian? No. Presently I recognised Mr. Clegg, for he always—paradoxical as it sounds—walked at a trot! But what was he doing in this direction? And why was he wearing Sunday garments? A brown serge suit and an expensive Panama hat! His face, too, was in Sabbath garb, being decked in smiles. To tell the truth, he

generally smiled on me nowadays, for I had not been stiffnecked or "withholding" when he put me to the question torture. I had humbly admitted that I lived in Berkeley Street, that my father had been the well-known diplomat, the Honourable George Bosworth, and that my mother was "a March," in fact—for I made no attempt at concealment—one of "*the* Marches."

"Well, so here you are!" he called out. "I have come to meet you," he added, with an air of royal condescension.

"Oh, Mr. Clegg!" I exclaimed, "how could you? Do think of the fishing record, and the precious hours you are wasting!"

"The fish are taking short, and time, dear lady, spent in *your* society is never wasted."

I received his compliment with a laugh.

"You know you ought to help to make the record bag, and beat the Torva people."

"True, but I am out of luck and am taking a day off. You saw the beauty?"

"Yes, and she really is well worth walking four miles to see."

"A mere chit, a little uneducated peasant! For my part, I admire something more cultivated, and —er—mature."

"Such as Miss Rivers?" I suggested innocently.

"Oh, by no means," he replied with unexpected energy. "She is quite the antipodes of my ideal,

and"—he paused—"unless I am greatly mistaken, there is something very 'fishy' about that girl."

"Well, yes," I admitted; "she generally *has* a fish about her!"

This was a thrust, but it glanced harmlessly off his triple-plated armour.

"Oh, I don't mean that," he rejoined; "but I'll say no more. You believe in her, I know." (And his tone intimated "and so much the worse for you!") "Then there is Miss Ducky, or whatever you call her," he resumed.

"I think we call her Miss Bassett," I answered stiffly.

I knew that he annoyed her beyond expression by addressing her indifferently as "Miss Ducky," "Miss Chucky," or "Miss Birdie."

"Well, she is altogether too exuberant for *my* taste, and at any rate she has her eye on the sailor fellow."

"I think it would be more according to facts, to reverse the expression."

"Oh, that's understood! All sailors are accomplished flirts; it's part of the profession. But he is a poor man, and she hasn't a rap; he'll love and sail away, just like the rest!"

"Pray don't malign the senior service to me, Mr. Clegg; I am very fond of bluejackets."

"Oh, of course, I am not in earnest," he declared, with a whirl of his stick. "I am fond of them, too.

Ahem!" clearing his throat, "has it ever occurred to you, Miss Bosworth, that you and I, have many tastes in common?"

It certainly had not—the idea had the merit of novelty; the sole taste we shared was for the liver wing of a chicken, which he invariably (being carver) withheld and devoured.

"I've been attracted to you from the first," he went on.

"Really! How nice of you to say so!"

"You see, you are not sporting, and never take a rod in your hand, and I now tell you, in the strictest confidence, that I abhor *all* women who fish!"

"If Mrs. Valdy were to hear you, she would turn you out of the house—and, perhaps, into the river."

"Yes, and I have no desire to stir at present, so I hope you won't give me away."

(I only wished that I could. I was ready to present him to anyone on the spot.)

The next sentence came as a shock.

"Miss Bosworth," he said, "you and I are not as young as we were—we are sympathetic, we are alone in the world——"

At the word "world" he stood stock still, and as he turned and faced me, the awful conviction broke upon me in one swift flash—the man was going to ask me to marry him! I must instantly nip the proposal in the bud—there was not half a second to lose.

"There I don't agree with you at all, Mr. Clegg. We have no tastes in common; on the contrary, they are exactly opposite—I may say antagonistic. For instance, you drink coffee, I drink tea. You like heat, I prefer cold——"

"Oh, but extremes meet," he interposed hastily.

"Also," I continued in a hard, inflexible voice, "although I admit that I am no longer *young*, and that I am alone, so to speak, yet for a certain reason I have been alone these twenty years, and I shall remain alone to the end of my life, and until it shall please God to call me."

I announced this with an air of absolute finality, for I was seriously alarmed. I, too, was well content with the "Happy Valley," and had no desire to curtail my stay—but how can a woman sit by a man she has refused, during three regular meals a day—and for weeks?

I stole a swift glance at my squire. He was unquestionably discomfited; his complexion had assumed something of a dough colour, and he was nibbling his lips with greedy energy.

"Miss Bosworth," he resumed in a solemn tone, "reflect; and do not be hasty, but please endeavour to realise that I offer you a most sincere and disinterested affection——"

"But, Mr. Clegg," I broke in hastily, "I never until this moment supposed that you regarded me as anything but the merest acquaintance—a fellow guest."

Here he silenced me with a wild wave of his stick, and continued: "I am not a man who wears his heart upon his sleeve—my heart is in the right place, I assure you. I am still in the prime of life—I am well connected, well born, and I think I may say, well liked. It is many years since I have felt as much attracted to a woman as I am to you. Of course—ahem!—we have both had our little love affairs—ancient history now; *my* former divinity is a grandmother—seriously, I cannot tell you how I long for a sweet sympathetic companion, for a refined home, for a—a—loving wife to—to——" after a moment's reflection, "close my eyes."

Unhappily my tongue runs away with me! and I could not resist answering: "Pray how do you know that she would not—open them?"

After this reckless suggestion, came a truly formidable silence.

"Is this your usual flippant way of talking? Yes, and of laughing at people?" he demanded, with a sternness bordering on ferocity. "Do you understand, that I am asking you to marry me? What is your answer, your last word?"

"If it were my last breath, my answer must be 'no,'" I replied with commendable courage.

My companion gave me a glance so piercing and so furious that I felt actually cowed, and hastened to add, "Of course, I am aware—that you intended to do me a great honour—in asking me to be your

wife"—a wild, impish thought capered through my brain and whispered, 'Mrs. Clegg—Mrs. Rachel Clegg'—"but I shall never marry."

The sole rejoinder was an angry cough—a cough which implied scornful incredulity.

At last he said, "I need not ask you to keep this—er—er—interview to yourself, Miss Bosworth?"

"Of course," I replied; "and I trust it will make no difference in our everyday life."

But to my civil remark there was no reply. Fortunately, we were now close to Randval. In absolute silence we passed the carpenter's house, where I noted Ulaf working at his lathe. Then we came to the "short cut," and down this my companion turned, with a speed and abruptness that was both unflattering and startling, and hurried toward the house with—unless I was much mistaken—a very large black dog on his back.

For my own part, I affected to be unconscious of his desertion and continued my journey leisurely by the road; passed over the stream by the pretty rustic bridge, and effected a dignified and stately entrance —alone.

CHAPTER XVI

"DRESSING UP"

IF Mr. Hopkins preferred the top water it was curious how often Miss Dovey was found casting at the lower end, but she was an uncertain fisherwoman—sometimes she sketched, sometimes she walked with me. I imagined her uncle was not sorry to have the boat to himself. Dovey had no real gift for the gentle(?) art, and hated to see the salmon gaffed and killed. As she expressed a desire to accompany me when I paid my promised visit to Marli, daughter of Ingeborge, one day we made a joint expedition to the house below the saw-mill.

At close quarters it was pretty, painted bright red; the roof of bark and sods, a picturesque mass of ox-eyed daisies. The interior, large and unexpectedly well furnished, gave an impression of solid comfort; it was the usual clean, bare, Norwegian kitchen, with its stove and wooden forms, but there was a certain air of antiquity and rough luxury about the carved presses, quaint chairs, the silver flagons, and bear skins.

Marli was at home, and welcomed us with dazzling smiles. Dovey was momentarily silent, impressed by the other girl's extraordinary loveliness.

"Here is my mother," said Marli, as a woman entered from an inner room in which stood a loom—a slight, careworn person of about forty; but in her lined face I still saw traces of notable good looks; her eyes were deep-set and expressive, her features well formed, but she had lost most of her front teeth, whilst her hair was thin and streaked with grey.

"I have come to see your daughter," I said, "and have brought her these," unfolding a picture paper and some books.

"Ah, yes; you are the kind lady who gave the biscuits. Thank you, Marli likes the English people."

"And you both speak English so well."

"I was often in the house above, where the big man is now; a lady came each year, and I used to play with her little girl, and then, when I grew up and could sew and knit, she took me to London as her maid. But she died, and I had to find another place as housemaid, and then—I married, and I came home, when Marli was but in my arms."

"You have still some English fashions," I observed, as I looked about and noticed plants in the window, little white curtains, and a square of rag carpet on the floor. "And you have some English things—that clock and those photographs."

"Oh, yes, some things there are good; what a rich, rich country!"

"One of the boatmen is your father, is he not?" interposed Dovey suddenly; "my uncle's gaffer. He does talk such a funny way—half Norwegian, and something not English—I can never understand what he says when I ask him questions; perhaps he does it on purpose." And she laughed; then added: "May I look at your photographs?"

"Oh yes," said Marli, rising and dusting various spotty and faded pictures.

"I see you have wonderful old Norwegian things," I remarked, as I noticed not merely the usual iron stove and long table, but fine carved presses and tall straight-backed armchairs, black with age, a spinning-wheel, and a painted dower chest.

"See, the good ones are here," and as she spoke she opened a press, and brought out a great silver cup—a "brandy wine" cup—and several wonderful old spoons.

"Oh, where did you get those?" asked Dovey, with a touch of awe.

"Get?" echoed Ingeborge. "How you mean? They have been in Lars's family hundreds of years, also the chests and chairs. That is the great-great-ancestor's chair; he was a jarl (earl), they say."

We turned to inspect the jarl's chair, a richly carved and most dignified piece of furniture; the arms were two gilded dragons, the seat was of old

leather, the back surmounted by a crown, and below it a date, 1521, the days of King Henry the Eighth. And these things were evidently the property, the family heirlooms, of Lars Oleson, who spoke an unintelligible jargon, and rowed a boat for two kroners a day.

How amazing it seemed.

After we had duly admired these extraordinary relics, we seated ourselves once more, and I said to Marli: "Do you ever go up to the *sæters* in the summer?"

"No," she answered, "only for one day—for fun—mother does not wish it."

"Indeed!" and I looked at Ingeborge interrogatively. "I thought it was part of every girl's education?"

"That is true, I used to go when I was young—it is an odd life—alone, or with another girl, for weeks up in the mountains."

"What did you do all day?"

"We milked the cows and watered them, and looked after the sheep. The scenery above is wonderful—so beautiful—but I hated the life, not because it was so hard, nothing but dry barley bread and milk, and for bed a heap of hay, but because of the wild beasts—the deer and the bears. Once a bear came round and terrified Kari and me; we dared not even go home for fear it would catch us; it killed and ate twenty sheep before a man came

with a gun. I've never forgotten that time. In winter, when the snow comes, there is snaring the ryper and ptarmigan. They catch the ptarmigan in such a funny way. When snow is very deep they take a bottle and make a long hole with it in the hard snow, and sprinkle grain in; and the birds, very hungry, come along and stretch and stretch down, head first, and gobble up the food and fall in and can't get out. Then a man comes along and pulls them out by their tails and kills them. I used to go up long ago with my grandfather."

"And Marli—she never goes?"

"Oh, she is not strong and hardy, like me."

"But indeed I am!" she disputed, "only mother won't let me do things like the other girls. *She* does my work, and in the cold winter mornings at five o'clock she gets up and goes with a lantern to feed the cows—that is surely my business."

When we took leave I said to Marli, "Won't you come down the valley and see me and Mrs. Valdy? She remembers you as quite a little child."

"Yes, one day I will go and take her flowers and some embroidery. Oh, yes, please tell her that I will kom"—pronounced with the k—"very soon."

.

It was a dark, dreary evening; it had been raining all day, and the fishing people were assembled indoors, when Margarette announced, "A woman to sell embroidery."

"What an hour to come!" exclaimed Joan, who was busy. "Rachel, please go and see what she wants."

Miss Rivers accompanied me, and as we entered the verandah we descried a girl with long fair plaits, wearing the national dress, and a shawl over her head.

"It is the beauty!" I whispered. "So she has come, in spite of wet weather!"

"I am glad to see you, Marli," I added aloud; "but what a bad day to choose!"

"Not so bad," she murmured. She had become surprisingly shy.

"And what have you got?" asked Miss Rivers. "A piece of Hardanger work," as she received it from a timid hand. "Very nice indeed. How much?"

"Five kroners," replied Marli, under her breath.

"Then I shall take it. But I must go up and fetch my purse."

"It is very late for you to come down the valley, child," I remarked.

"Oh, it is no matter; there is light always."

"Have you got earache?" I inquired.

She nodded, with a jerk of her shawled head.

"I am sorry. Wait a little, and I'll go and fetch Mrs. Valdy; she has remedies; and I know she would like to see you, and she will send someone back with you, I am sure. I suppose if we kept you

all night, your mother would be anxious? But we could telephone."

Marli shook her head, and whispered, "No, please."

I hated to think of this pretty child toiling all the long miles alone this miserable evening, and after a little further talk, I hurried in to the drawing-room to confer with Joan.

"The beauty has arrived," I announced. "Marli! and brought some work for sale. Such an evening to be out! It is going to pour again. I wonder if we could stow her away?"

"We might; but what a silly girl to come to-day. I wonder her mother allowed it."

"Oh, I believe she has stolen a march on her parent."

"I must see her at once."

"You won't see much of her, as her head is swallowed up in a shawl. She has earache. She tells me she wanted a little money as a *surprise*, and that is how she happens to come alone."

Joan closed her account-book with a bang, and rose and followed me out, saying, "She must have something to eat; but I see the servants have called her in already."

For there was no one in the verandah, no one in sight—only Miss Rivers, who had returned with the money in her hand.

"Where is she?" she asked breathlessly.

"That is what we all want to know," I replied.

"She seems to have disappeared — sunk into the ground. I have her piece of work, she has gone off without payment. How remarkable!"

"Oh, she is with the servants," said Joan, going towards the kitchen. "No! How strange!"

We searched round the house. No sign of anyone. We went over to Oscar's. No, she was not there. No one in the least like Marli had crossed the door. So Oscar himself gravely informed us.

"Well, she was in the verandah not five minutes ago," I protested; "the earth cannot have opened and swallowed her, can it?"

"She has gone home. These girls run quickly. Perhaps she got a fright. You will find, missus, that it is all right," he assured us with unruffled placidity, and we were compelled to accept his statement, and be satisfied. As we crossed back towards the big house, we encountered Mr. Hopkins, bareheaded, breathless, and looking seriously put out.

"Have you been looking for anything?" I asked.

He made no reply, but stared at me stupidly.

"*We* are searching for the Norwegian beauty. She was in the verandah, and then she disappeared —melted, as it were, into thin air! Have you seen her?"

"Yes," he assented, "I have."

"And where is she?"

"I can't tell you. She was in the verandah for a moment."

"Perhaps it was a spirit?" I suggested—I had been reading Professor Myers' book—"sometimes, when we *very* much wish to see people, they become visible."

"Who do you suppose wished to see her?" he inquired sharply.

"Mrs. Valdy—she has heard so much of her; she has been hoping she would come."

"But it was no apparition," declared Miss Rivers. "I can vouch for that. I touched her hand when I took the work, and it was trembling; poor little girl, she was horribly shy."

"Yes," assented Mr. Hopkins, as if thinking aloud. "She *is* horribly shy."

We all went upstairs with our curiosity most painfully excited—the mystery still unsolved—and when I opened my door, I fell back in astonishment, for there was the Norwegian beauty, minus her shawl, figuring before my looking-glass. When she turned with a twirl and confronted me, I saw that it was Dovey!

"Dovey, how dare you?" I gasped.

"Did I not do it splendidly?" she demanded, her face rippling over with smiles. "I took you all in nicely, beyond my wildest hopes!"

"Yes, you did, indeed; we have been racing and chasing everywhere, but the lost beauty ne'er did we see."

"No, I took care of that. When I was alone I ran

over to Oscar, and his wife smuggled me upstairs. I was sitting on the top step, listening, when you all entered with kind inquiries." This was also addressed to Miss Rivers, who had now joined us.

"But what put it into your head?"

"Well, you see, it has been such a deadly dull day —such a long, long, weary day!"

"Yes, and no one up from—below," I remarked sedately.

She coloured brilliantly, and continued: "Uncle Dick bought me the costume in Bergen—there were quantities in Brand's shop; I said it would make a nice fancy dress, and he loves Norway so dearly he will buy *anything* Norwegian: and so he gave it to me, also the real head-dress. To-day, having nothing to do, I went up and tried it on, and struck by a happy thought, I decided to appear as the Norwegian girl, and see if I would not be a draw. I was; my experiment far surpassed my expectations. I had what the Americans call a 'record-breaking success.'"

"But why did you run away? Why did you not remain for your money?" inquired Miss Rivers. "We were going to offer you refreshments. Think of that!"

"And discover me, once I took off the shawl."

"You were uncommonly well got up," I said.

"Yes, Margarette dressed me and plaited my hair. She thought it a great joke; but, I say, I have found out something, that is *not* a joke."

"Yes? Pray let us hear it, at once."

"Promise me you will not tell."

"Oh, we can both keep secrets," I answered; "for my own part I am a sort of fire-proof repository."

"It is this then—but please *swear*—Mr. Hopkins is in love with the beauty of the bridge!"

"Admires her, you mean," I corrected. "I am one of her admirers myself."

"But surely you don't call her 'darling,' do you? and kiss her hand?" And she paused and eyed us with an impudent triumph. "Ah, ha! I see you are both struck dumb! Fancy this man, who has had all the society girls trying to please him—and succeeding in frightening him—for the last five years, actually falling in love with a little Norwegian peasant, whose grandfather is my uncle's gaffer, and whose mother was a servant!"

"Impossible!" I said, and yet I did not think so.

"Well, love does strange things," remarked Miss Rivers. "Sometimes it seems a sort of madness."

"But, Dovey, do tell us how you found out."

"With the greatest pleasure. As I sat in the verandah I noticed Toby Hopkins tying flies in the dining-room window. I gave a cough—you know the 'selling cough'?"

"I should hope so by this time," I replied impatiently.

"And he looked up as I waited; then he fixed his glass in his eye and stared, and I turned my head

so that he might see my beautiful plaits." And she shook them violently. "He was coming out when you two arrived, and that kept him back, and he only stood there waiting, but the instant I was alone he plunged into the verandah and took me fearfully aback by seizing my hand, and saying, 'My little darling, what an evening to come here! Why have you come? Is anything the matter?' Of course I only muttered and gurgled in the shawl. Then he must have heard a noise—he stooped and kissed my hand again, and said, 'I shall walk back with you, and you will tell me all about it. Don't stay—but just wait, and I'll get my cap. I don't want the people down here to see you.' Then he darted into the hall, and I took to my heels and flew across to Oscar's; in at the back door and up the stairs. I watched him from the window searching in one direction, and you two in another. Oh, such a commotion over the Norwegian! Such a success! Only I've tumbled into an unexpected secret, and what *am* I to do?"

"Nothing," advised Miss Rivers. "Silence is best."

"I also recommend a 'masterly inactivity,'" I said.

"But listen, if I go down to supper dressed *à la Norge*, as was my intention, to astonish you, and scandalise Mr. Clegg, Mr. Hopkins will know that I am aware of his *tendresse*. This will be embarrassing to us both."

"Yes, I should think he would grasp that fact, unless he is uncommonly dense."

"On the other hand," and she declaimed theatrically, "if I change into my own gown and say nothing, the poor fellow may have a sleepless night, wondering what has befallen Marli? And when he sees her to-morrow he is bound to overwhelm her with tender reproaches. Naturally she will repudiate the visit, and there will either be a dreadful lovers' quarrel, or *I* shall be unmasked."

"He cannot discover who it was, that played the trick; it might be anyone," said Miss Rivers.

"No, but he will easily guess," I said. "Who is the most light-hearted of the party, who has fair hair? I must say, Dovey, it is altogether rather awkward. You should consult Mrs. Valdy. And I think you had better take off your disguise and come down to supper; the gong went five minutes ago."

"Yes, and Mr. Clegg will have eaten all the salad! Well, I must fly," and she dashed out of the room.

"What do *you* advise?" asked Miss Rivers.

"I cannot say. I almost think if I were Dovey I would take Mr. Hopkins aside after supper, and confess the whole thing."

"So awful for a girl to let a man know, she has found out his little love affair."

"Yes, but I believe it is serious; he must have known Marli these two years. And if she loves him, she loves him absolutely for himself—think of *that* for a temptation! The poor child has never heard of forty thousand a year; it would have no meaning

to her intelligence — to her twenty kroner is a fortune."

"Her face is a fortune," corrected my companion. "She is the most lovely human being I ever saw."

"I wonder if she cares for him? If she does, I hope the course of true love may run smooth, and that there are no rocks ahead. The course of true love generally runs smooth when there is money."

"What a cynical speech, good housekeeper; and I dispute it. I've known a case where there was both love and money, and it came to—to grief."

Miss Rivers was for once speaking *herself*—then she added in a different key, "But come along and leave sentiment for solid reality. It is a woeful thing to be anticipated at meals. If we delay like this, Mr. Clegg will have not only disposed of the salad—but the lobster!"

CHAPTER XVII

TWO DISCOVERIES

IT turned out that Mr. Clegg had merely assimilated the claws of the lobster; the General did not venture on crustaceous food; Mr. Hopkins had no appetite. On the usually placid faces of Mrs. Valdy and the General there was a cloud, also they were ominously silent. On the other hand, Dovey was in wild spirits, her temperament was buoyant enough to rouse a community of nuns, and her chatter was ceaseless. I wonder if anyone had noted how curiously her hair was arranged? I noticed that her uncle's eye dwelt on her face with an expression of portentous gravity and displeasure: so he had discovered, and disapproved, of the dressing up! Mr. Clegg was unusually bright and talkative; he retold some of his stories, and touched lightly on certain old family scandals, traced the genealogy of Sir Robert Guise with an accuracy that was wonderful; genealogy was his craze—modern—he was a walking edition of *Who's Who?*, and the instant a new name cropped up invariably said, "Who is he?" If the subject were a married lady, "Who *was* she?"

To-night he discoursed of the Guise family, and declared his firm resolve to pay them an early visit, stay for a day or two, and see what sport they were having.

"I can tell you," said the General, "without your troubling to go all the way to make inquiries. I believe four of them sit in a boat and harl and play bridge—Dummy looks after the rods."

"And what do they fish with?" asked Miss Rivers.

"Oh, spoons, minnows, prawns—everything but a fly!"

"Well, I had a long chat with Lady A. through the telephone," resumed Mr. Clegg, "and she says she had no notion I was up here, and laid her commands on me to go down and report myself. I shall stay a couple or three days if our fishing is not good—and with this flood in the river it will take time to settle, eh?"

But the General was in no mood for discussion—he even refrained from contradiction when Mr. Clegg advanced a statement which he knew to be incorrect, and held up to praise a certain gaudy and vulgar fly. No. Something had happened. He went off, immediately after supper, to write up the day's take on the wall, to enter notes in his fishing diary, leaving Mr. Clegg master of the field, and charged with some mighty secret.

Whenever he nibbled his lips rabbit-wise I knew there was something he wished to say. So I left

him and Mr. Hopkins *tête-à-tête.* The General had invited Dovey to walk with him as far as the wooden bridge, where he went for his final smoke.

I found myself alone in the drawing-room with Joan, who exclaimed, "Isn't this too bad of Dovey?"

"So you have found her out too?" I said.

"Yes, it is really most unpleasant. So much for having girls! I've never done it before, and never will again—they upset everything. But the General was so anxious to bring his niece I could not refuse, and you yourself know how the other was simply forced upon me."

"At any rate she has been irreproachable!"

"Yes, so far; but the General has been furious; he has been talking to me, and now"—pointing to a disappearing couple—"he is talking to Dovey. I never attempted to undertake the post of chaperon, *non merci!* And, I must say, I had no idea she was that sort of girl."

"There is not a bit of harm in her! It's only high spirits!"

"Well, Rachel, I don't precisely know what your idea of 'high spirits' may be, but of course I'm aware that any love affair has your ear!"

"Not this particular one. If Mr. Hopkins talks to me I shall tell him what I think—that the girl is much too young and unsophisticated."

"But what, my dear Rachel, has Mr. Hopkins to

say to it?" demanded Joan. "If *he* were the man, it would be quite another matter, but Jack Waller has hardly anything, and besides, he may be engaged to someone else for all we know. He should certainly have spoken to the General."

"I have not the wildest idea of what you are talking about," I exclaimed in despair. "Explain—tell me—we are at cross purposes."

"I am referring to this," and she held up an envelope, out of which she silently handed me a photograph, kodak size. "Mr. Clegg gave it to me after tea. You know he is always about with his camera, taking what he calls realistic 'snapshots.' He brought me this—he was really rather nice about it; he said that he felt it his duty to speak, and that he thought I *ought* to know, as the girl was under my roof."

Without waiting to hear any further explanation, I pulled out a little photograph. It proved to be a view on the river, taken from a distance. Sitting on the bank with their backs to the camera were a couple, a man and woman—Dovey, I recognised her hat—a man, in a loose coat and panama, had his arm round Dovey's neck!

"Young Waller!" continued Joan. "I've observed that he admires Dovey and likes to talk to her; and I've also noticed that he chiefly fishes up at this end. To think of his daring to sit like this in broad daylight!"

"It is always broad daylight," I remarked.

"Do you defend them?" she demanded indignantly.

"No; Heaven forefend!"

"Of course, they had no idea that Mr. Clegg and his camera had marked them down!"

"I must say I think it was very mean of him to show it!"

"Well, there your romantic nature runs away with your good sense! He took this group several days ago, had no time to develop it, and was waiting for events—to—to——"

"To develop—that is to say, for an announcement, which has not been made! However, Dovey is of age, and old enough to know her own mind."

"Yes, but it is not treating her uncle well, to have a clandestine love affair under his very nose! And there are the Derings. *I* think Mr. Clegg was quite right to show the photo."

"He might have dropped a friendly little hint. I was sure he was up to some mischief by the way he was nibbling his lips at supper."

"Oh, how prejudiced you are, Rachel! He only meant to do a friendly thing."

"He was delighted to have a bit of gossip and scandal; if it had been something about Miss Rivers he would be completely happy."

"How implacable you are, once you have taken a prejudice!"

"Yes, I am afraid I am. What are you going to

do about this?" I continued. "Will he stick it up on the mantelpiece?"

"*For shame!* I've left the matter entirely to the General. He will deal with her—she is his niece, not mine."

"She might be yours if you liked," I murmured.

"Really, Rachel," she paused, speechless; then resumed: "He is taking her to task now, as they walk to and fro," and she cast a nervous glance through the open door.

"Yes," I said, "holding a court of inquiry. And Mr. Clegg is sitting in an armchair in the verandah and enjoying the scene with unaffected satisfaction. He has fired the mine, and is witnessing the explosion."

"By the way, what were you trying to tell me about Mr. Hopkins? I noticed that he ate no supper—nothing but a slice of ham. If *he* is in love with Dovey it will complicate affairs, and perhaps lead to a coolness between him and the General."

"You may set your mind entirely at rest. We have now two affairs in progress—Mr. Clegg has unearthed one, Dovey has discovered the other! Toby Hopkins is head over ears in love with the pretty Norwegian, and so far as I am in a position to judge he means to marry her. She is wonderfully beautiful; he is no flirt—I believe him to be a serious man—his nature is adhesive, and he will *stick* like one of his own plasters."

"Why!" rising to her feet, "this is worse than anything—it is monstrous, it is preposterous. That child Mark, the grand-daughter of one of my dearmen, to marry one of the most rich men in England! What will people say?"

"I'm afraid this house will be looked upon as a sort of matrimonial agency," I answered with composure, "if two of your nice many in the valley you will be compelled to—bolt."

"I think there is some mistake about your story; the other, unfortunately must be true. The sun cannot lie. What grounds have you for your case?"

In a very few words I put her in possession of the facts, and of what Dovey had discovered under the disguise of the Norwegian costume.

"Oh, this is it, you see!" cried Joan, actually wringing her hands. "So much for opening my house to young people; and now Dovey is in possession of Toby Hopkins's secret, and he knows it! That girl is mixed up with everything! *What* is to be done with her?"

At this instant Miss Dovey herself came racing up the steps, and burst into the room. She was in a condition of intense excitement, and I noticed that her eyes were red, she had evidently been crying.

"Mrs. Valdy," she began breathlessly, "what is all this horrid story Uncle Dick has been telling me, about a photograph Mr. Clegg has given you?

Where is it? Please let me see it at once," and she actually stamped her foot.

Joan put it into her hand without a word, but her mouth was set, and her face looked exceedingly grim.

"One of Mr. Clegg's famous groups! Do you know who these two people are?"

"Yes, I am afraid there is no mistake about that."

"I'm afraid there is. Who do you suppose them to be, Mrs. Valdy?" inquired Dovey, and her voice shook with suppressed passion.

"Why, needless to ask me, yourself and Mr. Waller!"

"Mr. Waller's sister! Do you think I am the sort of girl to sit dangling my feet over the bank below here with a strange man's arm round my neck? Do I look that sort of creature?" And she appealed to me with dramatic emphasis. "Oh, Mrs. Dering *will* be amused—she did it on purpose. But the lecture I've had from Uncle Dick has not been very entertaining to me! We saw Mr. Clegg stalking about with his kodak after fishing, and she said, 'He will take me for a man in my panama and coat, and think he will have you on toast.' So she put her arm round my neck, and we sat there quietly. When we peeped round he had crept away in a great hurry, as if on tiptoe. I wonder he did not hear us laughing."

This explanation was listened to in complete

silence. Miss Rivers and the General were now in the room.

"If you want further evidence," resumed Dovey, "here is a microscope," and Dovey took the photo to Joan, who protested, saying—

"My dear, I beg your pardon—and your word is amply sufficient."

"But do please look," she urged; "you can see her sitting on a stone in order to raise herself and appear taller than me—and see the bangle on her arm!"

Yes, to satisfy her we all did look, and plainly recognised these facts.

"So much for a joke, so much for two jokes, Dovey," I declared; "twice you have burnt your poor little fingers."

At this moment Mr. Clegg appeared in the doorway, nibbling his lips. He had come to hear the result of the court of inquiry and to applaud the verdict.

"Oscar says that there is a fresh run of fish, and as I am for the lower beat to-morrow, I believe I shall sit tight. I always think it is the best water. I'm going out now for an hour's harling—what do you advise me to take, General? A big black jay, or has he too much wing on him? and shall I try a silver grey?"

"One thing I advise you *not* to take, Mr. Clegg," said Dovey, suddenly moving forward, with her cheeks aflame, "and that is, my photograph—either behind

my back or otherwise. We have all seen your latest group, and it is not considered like me. As no one appreciates it, here" (and she handed him the photograph torn into little pieces) "it is. Good-night, everybody," and she flashed out of the room.

"Miss Bassett is annoyed, Mr. Clegg; there has been a misunderstanding," said Joan. "I daresay the General will explain your mistake. Excuse me, I have some business with the cook."

Naturally I had no desire to constitute the third in the conversation, and hustling up my work, effected my escape, leaving the General to deal with the no longer complacent photographer.

Alas! we never heard what took place at the explanation. The General could be brief and stern, but the result was eminently satisfactory.

When Miss Rivers was arranging my hair the next morning she said, "Good news! I have asked Oscar to run up the *two* flags. Mr. Clegg has departed!"

"What joy! For good?"

"Alas! no; only temporary relief—a mere visit, and possibly for bad. I fancy the General gave him a lecture, and he has gone away to have his feathers stroked down, and to enjoy a gossip with Lady G. He borrowed the milkman's *stolkjærre*, and has taken a suit-case and fishing-rod. I watched him as I was dressing, and thought of screaming out to know if he was taking his camera."

"It is just as well you did not. He dislikes you quite sufficiently."

"I can't bear to sit in the room with him!—but I like to see his face when one after another my fish go flop on the grass, and he has only caught a brown trout!"

"I think you have inflamed his hatred to such a degree, that if he had it in his power he would do you an ill turn; I've seen that expression in his eyes."

"What eyes! They are like a prawn's!" and she laughed. "Oh, Miss Bosworth, I owe you many a good turn. It is solely thanks to you that I can laugh once more. Seven weeks of this Happy Valley have been like an elixir to me. Some day you shall hear why I came here, and why I was so miserable."

CHAPTER XVIII

ULAF THE CARPENTER

NOW that Mr. Clegg had departed we felt like a different community (resembling school children after the inspector has withdrawn), and closed up round the table, and laughed and talked, and once more brought out our silly old jokes, precisely as if he had never been among us. No one deplored his absence, except his boatman, who, like all Norwegians, was a keen sportsman, and hated to miss the chance of fish, or to be chaffed by the others on his idleness. He was a youth named Karl, who had not yet won his spurs, and when several days would pass, and he had not gaffed a salmon, he became enveloped in a cloud of silence and despair. I always felt sorry for poor young Karl, and yet I was sorry for the fish too; it was extremely difficult to apportion my sympathies. The episode of the Norwegian costume was closed, the situation had developed no new features; I asked no questions, but I believe Dovey had a word or two with Mr. Hopkins, and they had come to a friendly under-

standing. I wonder if he guessed that we knew his secret? Or was he playing the ostrich?

It was the end of June, and the weather was splendid, but too hot and sunny for sport until after six o'clock. We used to while the sultry hours away sitting out in the wild grass garden under the shade of some trees. The garden was now the drawing-room and smoking-room combined. We only went indoors to sleep and eat our meals. Elsewhere we passed the golden hours, reading, working, writing up fishing diaries, or playing bridge. I may state at once that I am not a brilliant performer; I could no more do a problem than I could land a salmon; still, I don't commit any flagrant mistakes; I don't revoke; I don't declare hearts with four of a suit. Now the General was an expert and admirable player, cool, long-headed, daring when necessary, and very keen. He and Mr. Hopkins, Joan and I, played together for small points. I preferred Joan or Mr. Hopkins for partners. When I fell to the General's share I was nervous and lost my head, and sometimes the rubber. I was invariably scolded (of course, for my good) after the hand; and he made me so flurried when it was my turn to deal, leaving his place and solemnly walking round to inspect my cards, then resuming his seat and fixing me with his keen, dark eyes. Sometimes when I made a blunder he would rise and leave the table, and roam about the garden in order to conceal his despair. Once he assured me,

with terrible emphasis, "That I couldn't have played it worse if I had tried"; and in a voice choked with emotion demanded "*Why* I had not got out my diamonds? I had thrown away the game and possibly the rubber!" The General at the card-table was another man—brusque, outspoken, dangerous; apart from cards he became once more the suave, punctiliously polite and chivalrous little gentleman! Occasionally Dovey or Mrs. Dering played, and on these occasions I sat by listening to their scoldings with complete equanimity.

Strange to say, of late Dovey had entirely relinquished her rod; she rarely went to Tor since the photographic scare, and she frequently accompanied me in my walks. I had now a large circle of acquaintances in the valley, and managed to make myself pretty well understood. Among my friends was a young carpenter, who lived with his old mother half a mile down the road. Ulaf was a clever workman—he not only built houses and boats, and made coffins and churns, but, as an agreeable variety, he carved boxes, frames, and chairs in a really artistic manner. His mother had brought some carvings to the verandah for sale, and I had ordered several frames and a screen, and now and then dropped in to see how my work was progressing. I liked the workshop, a bright, airy room with six windows. There were two benches, a lathe, a pile of wood, and several shelves filled with books and drawings. Ulaf Haagen,

"Why!" rising to her feet, "this is worse than anything—it is incredible! it is preposterous! That child Marli, the grand-daughter of one of my boatmen, to marry one of the richest men in England! What will people say?"

"I'm afraid this house will be looked upon as a sort of matrimonial agency," I answered with composure, "if two of your rods marry in the valley; you will be compelled to—*build!*"

"I think there is some mistake about your story; the other, unfortunately, must be true. The sun cannot lie. What grounds have you for your idea?"

In a very few words I put her in possession of the facts, and of what Dovey had discovered under the disguise of the Norwegian costume.

"Oh, this is it, you see!" cried Joan, actually wringing her hands. "So much for opening my house to young people; and now Dovey is in possession of Toby Hopkins's secret, and he knows it! That girl is mixed up with everything! *What* is to be done with her?"

At this instant Miss Dovey herself came racing up the steps, and burst into the room. She was in a condition of intense excitement, and I noticed that her eyes were red, she had evidently been crying.

"Mrs. Valdy," she began breathlessly, "what is all this horrid story Uncle Dick has been telling me, about a photograph Mr. Clegg has given you?

She poked about among the chairs and frames, examined patterns and carvings, and declared repeatedly that she must bring Uncle Dick to buy presents. "Now," she cried, "here is an exquisite box!" suddenly producing one from behind a pile. "Oh, I really must have this myself! It has my initial, too, the letter M"—her name was Madoline.

Yes, indeed, there was a most chaste and elaborate M—a capital M—carved in the centre of the lid.

"What is the price?" she asked.

"It is not for sale," he answered, colouring and reaching out an anxious hand; "it is a present for a—friend. But I will take an order."

"You work so beautifully," she exclaimed, "I wonder you do not go, like so many of the young men do, to America. I am sure you'd get on well. Have you ever thought of it?"

"Oh yes," he assented, "I have had good offers to go there—several times."

"But you love Norway," I suggested; "you cannot tear yourself away from your home."

"No, that is true; I cannot. I love the valley, and am well content here."

When I offered him some designs which I had procured from England, he did not, as in valley fashion, immediately shake hands, but bowed and said, "You are very kind, and I thank you very much"; and presently he bowed us out.

Who was the girl that enchained Ulaf? My curiosity was unexpectedly relieved.

I discovered her identity within two days.

On Saturday night, the week's holiday, all the world was free to roam about and amuse themselves. I had climbed a hill opposite our house in order to gather flowers for the supper-table when I heard some delightful singing coming down the road. It was a Norwegian hymn, sung by several fresh young voices, accompanied by a zither.

I peered through the branches and beheld five couples, all dressed in their Sunday clothes, and all singing. They walked sedately two and two, and in the leading pair I recognised Ulaf and Marli.

So that was it!

Marli looked bewitchingly pretty, and her clear, sweet, happy treble trilled high above the others. The zither was in the hands of Ulaf, and it seemed to me that Mr. Hopkins's pretensions to the beauty of the Randval were likely to be disputed.

CHAPTER XIX

A DELICATE MISSION

THE people from down below had lunched with us one Sunday, and after the meal we divided and subdivided in order to spend the afternoon according to our individual tastes. Mrs. Dering and Joan elected to sit out in the garden under the cherry trees and watch the finches teaching their young families to fly. The General and Captain Dering announced an excursion to a fish hatchery; they were really anxious to get away alone, and talk *shop*, and argue out the pros and cons of conscription. Mr. Waller, Dovey, Mr. Hopkins, and I declared for a good walk. Mr. Hopkins, I need hardly state, was my companion; also, needless to add, he set his face towards the upper water, and as it was the prettiest bit of the river, I offered no objection. I believe I have never yet mentioned that I liked Mr. Hopkins—the longer I knew him, the more I discovered what a good fellow he was.

In the first place, though the son of an obscure apothecary, he was a gentleman: he was neither

selfish nor greedy—indeed, for such a big, stalwart person, his appetite was small. He was kind and thoughtful—in nervous, unobtrusive ways; most generous to the valley, but close-fisted to himself; he had no valet; his clothes, though respectable, were well worn; his watch was of silver; his studs of mother-o'-pearl.

Instead of being "purse proud" he was purse shy, and painfully sensitive respecting any allusions to "money." Had his father not discovered a medical mine, he would have made a fine soldier, whether officer or private—dogged, resolute, brave, enduring, and silent. Although a silent man, it was not from lack of material to discuss that his tongue was still; he read a great deal, and it seemed to me an incongruous discovery that this great, big, rugged sportsman was fond of poetry—for all I knew, a poet himself! He was a naturalist too, and told me much about the plants, flowers, and trees in our valley; also of the habits of the fish and birds, and the funny little lemming, which abounds in the north—a creature like a small guinea-pig, without a tail, but with bright rat's eyes and an irritable temper. I often noticed them during my walks peeping out of holes or in the grass. Once when I happened to disturb a lemming with my stick it squeaked at me so angrily for five minutes that I felt quite snubbed and sat upon. On the other hand, I found domestic animals tame, not to say sociable, the result, no doubt, of their enforced

indoor life. One afternoon a black and white calf accompanied me for two solid miles, and the more I shouted and scolded, the more attentive it became. Another time a brisk young pig rushed out and circled round me with every symptom of violent affection, and subsequently escorted me for half an hour.

On the present occasion I might as well have been escorted by the calf—my companion was so silent! At last he said: "Miss Bosworth, you have been wonderfully good to those girls! they are devoted to you; now I want you to be good to *me*."

"What can I do for you?" I inquired playfully.

"Well, I am going to give you the greatest surprise you have ever had in all your life!"

"I defy you to do that," I responded; "this valley has accustomed me to anything."

"Will you sit down here?" He indicated a great moss-grown stone close by the wayside. "We have come at a smart pace."

"Yes." I looked back, the other pair lagged at least a quarter of a mile behind; they were evidently talking incessantly and progressing at intervals.

"I have something most particular to say to you," continued Mr. Hopkins as I took my seat, and his voice was husky with emotion.

Could it be possible that he was going to offer me marriage? It was the same road, and not far from

the critical spot. At the bare idea I felt myself becoming hysterical!

"You know me," he resumed, "and you know Marli, the grand-daughter of Lars! Well, look here! I want to make her my wife."

"Are you serious?"

"Yes, I am perfectly serious; it is a most serious matter to me. I met her two years ago; she was then a mere child. The fishing is all right enough, but it was Marli that brought me back to the Randval."

"Have you spoken to her?" I inquired judicially.

"No, but she knows that I like her tremendously, and I think she seems always pleased to see me. Parents count in Norway. So I intend formally to ask old Lars's consent to-day, or, rather, I want *you* to do it for me!"

"What, me? Oh, Mr. Hopkins, I really—really could not."

"Yes you could," he answered with great decision. "Old Lars likes you because you are Mrs. Valdy's friend, also because you don't fish. Oh, he has his ideas! He was Captain Valdy's gaffer for many years, you know, and she has passed him on to the General. Lars is a blunt old boy, very self-reliant and proud, but I cannot make head or tail of his jargon. Now, you speak Norwegian wonderfully well, considering that you have only been here eight weeks."

"I have a knack of languages; it is half German, and I had a German nurse; also I wanted to be able to talk to the people."

"Yes, now I want you to talk to Lars for me. I cannot understand him."

"Who can?" I objected; "he has his own language; when he speaks Norwegian the people think he is speaking English, and when he talks English it is supposed to be Norwegian."

"I think *you* could make him understand."

"Yes; what is he to understand?"

"That I love little Marli, and she, I hope and believe, cares for me, and not for my money, thank God! At home I am a marked man—as 'Toby Hopkins, the plaster fellow!' the plaster sticks—she, bless her, does not realise that I am different to anyone, and to her a kroner seems riches. I'll take her to England, and provide for her mother and Lars. We could be married in Tor church, have a big wedding in the valley, Miss Rivers and Miss Bassett bridesmaids—the General as best man! Is she not lovely? What a face it is, so sweet and innocent and good!"

"But she is only seventeen, why such a sudden impulse?" I interrupted; "and perhaps she likes someone already."

"To tell the truth, I'm always afraid of someone else seeing her and carrying her off," was his ingenuous reply. "I am not afraid of the young

Norwegians; she is a cut above them, and knows it, too. But there's a strange chap up the valley, hanging about at the Syds station—English, I fancy, idle too, and the best-looking fellow I've seen for years. It's a sort of Viking face, and recalls the lines, 'A strong man from the North—light locked, with eyes of dangerous grey.' Now, if he was to see her!" he paused dramatically.

"Or she were to see *him!*" I suggested.

"That's true," he sighed, "and I am such a devilish ugly beggar! Come now, Miss Bosworth; give me a helping hand."

"A helping tongue, you mean! Well, I will do what I can in explaining your wishes to Lars." (But in the back of my mind I was thinking of handsome Ulaf, the carved box, and the letter "M.")

By this time Dovey and Mr. Waller were beside us, and she exclaimed: "Dear me! what a pace you walk at! you wear the seven-leagued boots. No wonder you had to rest, Miss Bosworth."

"And now I am ready to proceed," I remarked. "Did you notice the wonderful red berries as we came along by the waterfall?—and all the lemmings at the last bend?"

"No—I didn't," and she blushed and laughed. Of course she saw nothing but Jack, and he saw nothing but her!

To give them due credit, they were not a selfishly absorbed couple, they were good enough to recognise

the existence of other human beings. Jack came alongside of me, and we discoursed of the sea, and ships, and foreign parts—old ships and foreign parts, in which I had had such a passionate interest twenty years ago. For I, too, had loved a sailor.

I think the couple behind us were too deeply engrossed with their own reflections to care to converse. When we arrived at the bridge Mr. Hopkins came to a standstill and boldly announced, "Miss Bosworth and I are going up to see old Lars."

"Oh, then we will come too!" said Dovey eagerly. "Mr. Waller is simply dying to see the beauty. Now is his chance! He wishes to lay his heart at her feet!"

Then I said, as I glanced significantly at Dovey (she was, and is, an intelligent young person): "But we have a little business with Lars."

"You won't understand a word he says," protested Jack Waller. "He brought me a message once, and it was all 'Mong-bong-long, Vong.'" Here he reproduced such an exact imitation that he made us all laugh. "Could you not invite the young lady to come down to the bridge and meet Miss Bassett, while you two interview grandpapa?"

"No," I said resolutely; "she is possibly out, and what is the use of lacerating your heart? Do you and Miss Bassett go and 'sit on the bridge at daylight, when the clock is not striking the hour.' You won't see anything prettier than the view from the far

end," and to avoid further discussion I turned away and left them.

"I say! How splendidly you managed that, Miss Bosworth," said Toby Hopkins, as he strode beside me up to the door of Lars's comfortable two-storied log-house. As we approached I noticed a pony tethered outside, and heard within the sound of tinkling music—like a zither; nevertheless I knocked boldly, and in a short time we were admitted into the large, low, comfortable room. There we found Ingeborge in her Sunday gown, and old Lars himself. Lars was a big man, with a rough-hewn, clean-shaven face; he wore a grey fringe under his chin, a suit of black, a pair of knitted muffetees, and a red comforter, artlessly fastened by a hairpin! They seemed unaffectedly surprised to see us, shook hands cordially, and offered seats.

After some preliminary talk about the condition of the river and the fish, Mr. Hopkins cleared his throat, glanced at me significantly, and began speaking, with loud, laboured distinctness, precisely as if Lars was stone deaf.—I trembled lest he should be audible at the bridge!

"Lars Olsen, I have come here on a particular errand, to tell you that I love your grandchild Marli, and I wish to marry her, and take her to England. What do you say?"

Old Lars looked completely bewildered, Ingeborge's face flushed deeply, and I noticed that she was trem-

bling. After an expressive silence, she proceeded to explain at great length the situation to her father, who had sat down squarely in the jarl's ancient chair, with a large hairy hand spread on either knee, as if prepared to deliver judgment. When a young man Lars had been celebrated for his strength and physique; even now it was a fine old frame, a fine old head, a fine old Norse face, although the features were rugged and the grey eyebrows somewhat fierce.

At last he spoke in his deep guttural voice, "Von tide, von Inglis voman, tak mine datter, Engles, to mak her glad und rik. Dis ting no kom! Her kom back wid one child, little Marli, dis mong, she marry, send her back no mony, no glad—dis ting all too much——"

"But this thing would be entirely different," interrupted the suitor, "that I will swear; Marli shall have everything money can buy—as if she were a princess. I am rich—I could make her happy, I know I could."

"Me no tink she skal marry money; she skal stop hyem (home)."

"And I want her to come to England."

"Me no like she do dis ting!" added the old man doggedly.

"I have millions of kroners, and she will have beautiful houses, and jewels, and horses!"

"Na—na," looking straight before him, and speaking as if from a judgment seat. "Bedderer she stop in

the Randval. Some day she marry, and I skal giv two coos, some money, and all she skal want!"

"Yes, if she must marry some day," said Mr. Hopkins, rising to his feet and confronting the speaker with unexpected energy, "why not *me?*"

"Engles men good for catch fish—no good for catch girl; and min (me) tink when she gifte (married) she skal ha young Ulaf, he much *bedderer.*"

Meanwhile Ingeborge remained motionless, with tightly clasped hands, leaning against the dresser and staring intently at the two men. She had been in England, and realised what Marli's lover was offering and what her old peasant father was so brusquely refusing. She had seen with her own eyes the fine houses, stepping horses, jewels and luxuries, of which Toby Hopkins spoke. It was indeed an extraordinary spectacle—this eager young millionaire vainly suing for the hand of a fisherman's granddaughter.

"I don't believe he understands me, Miss Bosworth," cried poor Toby in a tone of despair; "will you speak to him in his own tongue? Make it clear." And thus summoned I entered the lists, and in my best and most pithy Norwegian endeavoured to lay the case before this inexorable patriarch.

I pointed out Mr. Hopkins's sincere affection, his single-minded devotion, his good name, and how much we all liked him. I said he was so kind and generous, and I added: "He can do much for *you*

and Ingeborge. In refusing him you refuse good fortune—do you understand me, Lars?"

The answer he gave was a startling "Yea ow!" which sounded precisely like a dog yawning, then he shook his head with decision.

"Then let us leave it to Marli herself," urged Mr. Hopkins eagerly. "Call her, will you?" turning to her mother.

Ingeborge was our ally—I read the fact in her eager eyes. She walked swiftly to the door, and said, "Marli, kom."

In a short time Marli had entered. She wore the national dress, and an ancient silver cross; her cheeks were roses, and her eyes like bright blue stars.

"Look here, Marli," began Mr. Hopkins suddenly, taking her hand in his. "You know, child, that I like you very much—don't you?"

She smiled a radiant assent, which exhibited her exquisite dimple.

"And you like me?"

Marli nodded gaily, and then added, "Yes, you are—so good."

"Do you know that I want you to marry me some day, Marli? I want you to be my wife!"

A long pause and then—"Marry you, oh!" her colour faded, and she dropped his hand; "I never thought of that."

"Yes, and come to England—your father was English—and be an Englishman's wife."

Marli gazed at me, then at her grandfather—finally at her mother.

"Child," she said, answering the look, "it is a wonderful offer—as I understand—it means beautiful horses, a house like a palace, such as you read of in story-books, many servants, and velvets, and precious stones, and being a great lady——"

"Yes, and your people shall always be my people, Marli," broke in Toby Hopkins, who was white with excitement. "I will buy a great farm for your grandfather, and a thousand cows."

"But I must go away from the valley," she said, and her lips twitched at the corners and her blue eyes filled up.

"Yes, but sometimes you shall return, and see it and all your friends."

"And Ulaf!" she cried, looking straight at her mother.

"Child, you choose now—this great English gentleman," said Ingeborge, "or Ulaf, the carpenter?"

Marli suddenly sat down, flung her white apron over her head, and broke into wild heartbreaking sobs. Her grief was distressing to witness; old Lars stared stolidly at her and then at Mr. Hopkins, and finally he said in his guttural voice, with inexorable determination—

"*Na, na, na,*" and having pronounced this verdict he rose stiffly from his seat of judgment, reached down a shabby bowler hat, and with a wave of his

pipe at the assembled group, opened the door and shambled out.

Then I signed to Mr. Hopkins that our embassy was useless, and that we should also depart.

"It is then Ulaf," he whispered, stooping over Marli. "*Is* it Ulaf? Tell me?" and thrice she nodded her golden head.

Meanwhile Ingeborge was leaning against the dresser, twisting her worn hands nervously together, her face was fixed and flushed. "Oh, she is a foolish child!" she wailed, "and has thrown away her fate. Though I had bad luck with an English husband, I know *he*"—pointing to Mr. Hopkins—"would be different; but when the old man's mind is fixed, as well try to turn the mountain; and Marli is his own grand-daughter, they are well agreed; but I am sorry; good day," and she shook hands with me, whilst Mr. Hopkins passed quickly forth without any farewell whatever.

"Perhaps it may be all for the best," I murmured consolingly; "I'm sure her heart would be always in this valley." I stole a glance at him; his brown face had whitened, and he turned away to conceal the anguish he could not control; at last he said—

"What, with Ulaf—that fellow who mends my rod boxes—she is thrown away! Miss Bosworth, she is the first girl I have asked to marry me, and she will be the last! Oh, my little Marli!" and his voice broke. "I never dreamt that there was another man."

"Here are the others," I said, to put him on his guard, as Dovey and Mr. Waller came smiling towards us.

"What a short time you've been!" she cried. "I expected you were going to stop at least half an hour." It had seemed a long time to me.

"I hope your business has been satisfactorily arranged?" said Jack Waller.

For a second I was at my wits' end. After casting about in quest of a sophistical reply I said: "Oh, we only went in to ask a question."

Fortunately for me I was not in the hands of Mr. Clegg, for with this rather vague explanation, the happy young couple—whose love tale was as yet untold—remained content.

CHAPTER XX

THE STRANGER

THE middle of July brought the event of the year to the valley—that event was the haymaking. For many days, another bad season was dreaded. Five seasons had nearly ruined the Randval folk, and sent some to America, others to the grave. Now the weather was scanned with an expectation that was painful, for clouds still overhung the big mountains. Then suddenly one enterprising farmer cut the grass around his house and along the edge of the road, and hung it up on sticks to dry in a manner peculiar to Norway; where it looks as if the hay was festooned on a clothes-horse!

Each blade of grass is precious for fodder; every obtainable patch is not merely shorn, but shaved. In the great expanse of bronze-reddish meadow around us, I heard the scythe one morning, and presently all the people—men, women, and children—were hard at work. Over the valley now there was haymaking day and night; and the crop was collected with nervous speed—from the mountain, by the river,

along by the roadside. Every pony in the district worked as if it knew that on its labours depended its winter forage, and whether that would be bark and leaves, or sweet dried grass.

These ponies are extraordinarily intelligent; they know every word of command—to go on, to stop, to back—and have been brought up indoors like domestic animals; Norwegians are very kind to their creatures. In these busy days the traffic between the hayfields and the barn never ceased. A Norwegian barn is an important two-storied affair; beneath is the cattle-shed, above is the hay and provender. A slanting wooden gangway reaches to the barn door, and up this the ponies dash, taking the load straight into the loft; then wheeling about and carefully stepping down the wooden stairs. It is marvellous to see them. Dovey and I became so deeply interested in the harvest—we might have been landed proprietors. The general industry proved infectious; we turned up our dresses, tied on our shadiest hats, and took our place in the line with rakes and fork, and worked steadily for hours. Miss Rivers, too, threw aside her rod and helped us; there was a fascination in this employment, a feverish sensation of struggling against fate, and desperate resolve to snatch a good crop from the rain god. Our hands and our faces were a sight—tanned to mahogany colour—but we did not care, though Joan remonstrated and assured us that we should knock ourselves up. The General

expressed polite surprise, and Mr. Clegg openly jeered; one man alone was sympathetic—and a recruit—that man was Jack Waller. He abandoned fishing—yes, and the river in splendid order—and took to hay-making, *con amore!* This expression may be read in two ways.

The labours of the day ended, Dovey and I sometimes enjoyed a holiday across the valley. Here we scrambled in the woods, picked flowers, and ate quantities of wild strawberries. I remember once, as I sat on a knoll contemplating the landscape and the green forests, listening to the river and the birds, asking myself, could it be possible, that in three or four months this entire scene would be covered with snow? the river frozen, the light of day extinguished, and all those merry haymakers and bell-ringing cattle shut up in the farms—prisoners to a climate?

And I liked this nation, who lived a hardy, healthy, monotonous life, surrounded by a freshness of the early world. They had a natural good-breeding, a loyalty to primitive virtues and actions, that appealed to me irresistibly.

.

One afternoon, the haymaking being at an end, Dovey and I made an expedition to a famous creamery some distance up the valley. On our way back we lagged and lingered, gathering flowers, uprooting rare

ferns, picking strawberries; and the hour was late when we found ourselves standing by the ever-necessary ferry, which was not our ferry, but one some miles above Randval. We were rather tired, and sat down to rest on the bank and surveyed a flock of sheep on the other side, who were about to be put across. The owner and two boys had collected them on the shore, whilst a man brought over a flat boat for their transport. It seemed to me that the flock knew precisely what was expected of them; they were being taken across to go up to the *sæter* on the other side for grazing; they had been before. Anyway, an old sheep with a loud bell got deliberately into the boat, and the others instantly followed. We watched them on their passage, and they appeared to be thoroughly at home; as they came nearer I noted what tame, grave faces they had—lambs and all—as if they knew that life and living was hard, and that they must make the best of a bad business.

I was still gazing at the sheep when Dovey exclaimed, "Do look at the man on the other side. He is not a Norwegian."

I looked as desired, and beheld a figure in grey clothes standing on the bank. More I could not discern, being rather short-sighted.

We sat there patiently, but no ferryman appeared; the sheep had gone up the hills behind us, the bell tinkled faintly; from above came the cow calls—that

weird but musical cry; and still we waited to get over.

The ferry-boat was at the opposite shore, and I suppose the stranger guessed at our plight, for he raised his cap and shouted, "Do you want to get across?"

"Yes," screamed Dovey; "the ferryman is not here." (He was, of course, haymaking.)

"Shall I come and fetch you?"

"Thank you very much."

Without more ado he stepped into the boat, and was soon below the steep bank on which we stood. I then discovered that he was an Englishman, about thirty, tall and well made; the face which he raised to ours was astonishingly good-looking. As he looked up, with his cap in his hand and a smile, he said, "The new ferryman, at your service!"

I observed his crisp, fair locks, bronzed, well-cut features, black-lashed, expressive grey eyes, and masterful chin.

Here was undoubtedly "the strong man from the North—light locked, with eyes of dangerous grey!'

"I expect the old gentleman is getting in his harvest," he remarked, and his voice was very pleasant; "and leaving the ferry to take care of itself."

"And our supper to chance," I replied. "It is so good of you to officiate."

"Oh, I am only too glad of the job. I am an idle fellow, and the local Charon is up to his ears in hay."

As he spoke he handed us carefully down some steep rocks into the boat, and was soon rowing us over the rapid current with fine sweeping strokes.

"I am much obliged to you," I repeated. "We are late. We have enjoyed ourselves so much"—and I held up my great bunch of flowers—"that we lost count of time."

"Yes, and of distance," added Dovey plaintively. "We must have walked ten miles, and I'm so tired."

"I say, I'll tell you what I'll do," he exclaimed, "if you like. Why should I not row a bit of the way home? We will be no time going down on this current?"

"And what about the ferry?" I asked severely.

"Oh, I'll only borrow the boat for a spell, and row it back again—they are all haymaking, you know—may I?"

"It seems rather a shame to take you out of your way——"

"I've no particular way, and I'm fond of rowing, even in this old tub, which is not even the sealed pattern of the river fishing-boat!" And, as he spoke, he turned her head homewards.

We went smoothly with the current, which was strong, and with little exertion he kept us going swiftly along the rapid Rande.

I sat in the stern—a somewhat irksome perch—Dovey amidships, directly facing the stranger.

"You are not comfortable there," cried the boat-

man, suddenly shipping his oars and pulling off his coat; "you must make the best of this."

"Oh, but really——" I protested.

"Really, I like rowing in my shirt sleeves." Then he added with a smile (his eyes were always smiling), "Where shall I put you ashore, ladies? What is your number and address?"

"Randval House," I answered.

"Yes, I know, the paying-guest place—Mrs. Valdy has a great reputation. I believe men fight like the Kilkenny cats over her rods, but I never heard that she tolerated ladies."

"Oh, for once," put in Dovey; "there are no less than three of us this season."

"Three!" he repeated slowly. "Does the other lady explore, or does she fish?"

"Oh, she is as keen as can be—a wonderful fisherwoman—I cannot understand her craze; she does not care for anything in the wide world but a fresh-run salmon."

As she spoke, I noticed that our boatman's gaze was intently fixed on Dovey, as anxiously as if he expected her lips to drop the legendary precious stones.

His gay, grey eyes had become momentarily overcast; undoubtedly he had once been interested in some fair angler.

"Have you been out long?" he asked, after a lengthy silence.

"About two months. And you?"

"I came to Norway four weeks ago and have been wandering about ever since—in search of——" He paused.

"Yes?" and Dovey looked at him interrogatively. I could not see her face from the way we were seated, but I was certain from her attitude that she was not averse to embarking on a flirtation with our good-looking boatman.

"Yes, in search of what?" she repeated coquettishly.

"Oh, the usual thing—happiness!" he answered with a laugh, but I could tell that he was serious by his eyes.

"It is a mere empty word, is it not?" he added.

"Perhaps you may find it here," said Dovey. "Mrs. Valdy calls this part of the world the Happy Valley. I suppose you are fishing; no one comes here for anything else."

"No; actually, I am not fishing! Don't you think I should be framed and glazed?"

"Certainly I do; fancy a man coming to Norway who does not fish."

"As a sport it has never appealed to me; it is too cold-blooded. I prefer something more stirring, such as polo or steeple-chasing. I agree with Dr. Johnson about the worm and fool."

"Well, you are a brave man to say so, in this valley," I announced. "If the fisher-folk get hold of

you, you will possibly be gaffed, and driven into the sea!"

"But though I do not fish, I suppose I may presume to enjoy the valley in a humble way? This neighbourhood has a fascination of its own!"

To this I assented with a nod.

"I left here a fortnight ago, and some extraordinary desire to see it again, has actually brought me back. I cannot explain it, but there it is! Your Happy Valley must hold a spell of enchantment."

"Our Happy Valley is a most lovely spot," I said, as I lay back at my ease on my improvised cushion.

Borne on the strong, iron-coloured current, the banks of the Rande seemed to flit past. They were covered in places with a blaze of harebells and pansies, in dense masses of violet and blue. The air was clear and dry, filled with the perfume of newly-gathered hay, the sounds of laughing and singing. Above, on the mountain, we could hear the cattle calls—that wild, melodious, long-drawn cry, which summons the cows to the *sæters*.

"Have you ever been on the mountains?" I asked.

"Yes, several times."

"What is it like up there?"

"Wild and grand. There are great swamps and lakes; it has a peculiar attraction of its own—most weird and desolate scenery."

"Then I should hate it," cried Dovey. "I don't like gloom. It must be terrible here in winter and

darkness. I am so sorry for the people who remain, whilst we, having enjoyed the cream of their year——"

"Skim away, like the swallows!" supplemented our boatman.

"Yes, and they are nice folk, and have such quaint customs. Do you know that, no matter how scarce fodder may be, every farm on Christmas Eve hangs out a sheaf of corn—for the birds."

After this the conversation became entirely confined to Dovey and her *vis-à-vis;* seated in the stern I was somewhat of an outsider.

Dovey undertook most of the talking; she was unusually animated and voluble. I saw the stranger's grey eyes look back into hers with an expression of amusement and interest—no more. The strong man from the North, although supremely at his ease with girls, was no flirt.

For my own part I was enjoying a sort of delicious day-dream—a little private lotus-eating; one of those rare hours that turn back to us from life's summer.

Plunged in this soft afterglow I was but dimly aware of my two companions. As in a dream I saw a flower offered (oh, Dovey!) and accepted as "ferry toll." The ferryman placed his fee in his waistcoat buttonhole with as nonchalant an air as if it had been presented by Crabbe.

As in a dream I heard the young man say, "Does the other young lady *never* take a day off?"

"Never, except to tie flies. She is a most matter-of-fact, businesslike fisherwoman. She does not care for society or scenery, and she hates men."

"I say! What bad taste!"

After this I must have dropped off into a little slumber, from which I was awoke by the sound of the potent word "sickness."

"What sickness?" I asked, once more striking into the conversation.

"A fever peculiar to this valley, and there is a good deal about—at least, so I'm told at the Skyds station, where I'm staying."

"Why do you not move on?" inquired Dovey.

"Oh, I'm tough; I never catch anything."

"We have not heard a word about this fever."

"They'd keep it from you; and, of course, you are safe."

"But is it really serious?"

"Yes, a good many people have died; my landlord talks of nothing else."

"How cheerful for you! No one mentions it in our part of the world."

"They do," I interposed. "I remember Oscar saying that the dancing-house was closed, because there was a sick family close by."

"I believe they have only one nurse in the valley," said the stranger.

"I think I met her yesterday," I said, "tramping along—a worn, harassed-looking creature."

"And no wonder," he said; "no one volunteers to help her, for I believe people are so scared they won't go within yards of a place, the fever is so infectious."

"Is it?"

"Yes, I believe it decimated the valley twenty years ago, and I was told that a sheepskin rug, brought out the other day, after all that time, proved a deadly covering to the man who used it."

"What an alarming sort of sickness, and you must be in the thick of it," remarked Dovey, in a tone of anxious remonstrance.

"Oh, I've been in cholera camps—I don't mind."

Yes, I said to myself, that was a matter of duty, but now, what held him fast in an infected locality?

Well, here we were at last, close under our own bank, and we landed with dry shoes, thanks to our boatman's chivalrous anxiety.

"Pray don't catch the fever," I said. "And some day, if you have nothing to do, come and see us."

"I shall be delighted," he replied. "I shall come and be presented to the lady who hates men, and endeavour to mitigate her animosity. No, *please* don't thank me. I was much honoured—*au revoir*." And he got into the boat and rowed away.

As we stood watching his departure and waving farewells, I suddenly remembered that we did not know his name. What could we say to Mr. Clegg?

And late, unhappy thought. Why had we not invited him to supper? Why? And as I repeated the question aloud, I confronted Dovey with a guilty face.

"Yes!" she cried. "A shocking oversight! How good-looking he is—and yet peculiar."

"Peculiar," I echoed. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, when I talked, he seemed a little abstracted, as if thinking of something far away. I am certain he is writing a book."

"Not at all," I contradicted. "That man is a soldier. He spoke of India and cholera, and there is still a faint three-cornered patch on his forehead—he wears a cavalry cap—and he talked of a sealed pattern."

"What can that mean?"

"I am not sure—but, at any rate, he remains to us, a sealed mystery."

CHAPTER XXI

PRINCE CHARMING

THE house-party, minus Mr. Clegg, and plus Jack Waller, had almost finished supper when we entered, equally elated and hungry.

"News! news!" cried Dovey, tossing her hat and gloves into a chair.

"How eager you all look!" she added, with a merry laugh; "it is like throwing a crumb to a crowd of chickens!"

"It is many a day since I've been called a chicken," remarked her uncle. "Come along, sit down and eat your crumbs, you must be peckish."

"Oh, such an adventure! Yes, please, some cold fowl."

"Adventures are to adventuresses," remarked Joan. "What have you and Rachel discovered *this* time?"

"We have met Prince Charming," was the triumphant reply.

"Have you indeed! And pray why did you not bring him to supper?"

"Alas! we never thought of asking him until it was too late."

"And I'm sure Prince Charming would not do anything so prosaic as eat supper," put in Jack Waller. "He lives on smiles and humbug—and moonshine!"

"Do tell us all the details," urged Joan. "Spare nothing!"

Thus encouraged, Dovey, the glib-tongued, poured forth her tale with amazing volubility and animation.

"Rather a casual sort of a chap," remarked Jack Waller, "taking the ferry-boat."

"Oh, but he did it to oblige *us*," protested Dovey. "Surely you can't blame him for that?"

Jack's expression implied a certain amount of doubt.

"Where is he fishing?" inquired the General. "Up after trout on the lakes?"

"No, indeed, he hates fishing," announced his niece in a tone of satisfaction; "he likes steeple-chasing and polo."

"Then he must be entirely in his element in Norway," suggested the sailor.

"But what is he doing in the valley?" demanded Joan, with the air of a proprietor.

"I'm sure I don't know," I replied. "We must wait until Mr. Clegg returns, and he will tell us."

"Who and what is he?" persisted Joan.

"If you ask me," I said, "I believe he's a soldier."

"And I'm positive she's quite wrong," added Dovey; "he is *far* too clever to be in the service."

"Which of us is to return thanks, Waller, you or I?" said the General.

"Oh, of course I don't mean that," cried Dovey in crimson confusion, "but——"

"Don't!" I interposed. "You know you'll only make it worse."

"Well, then, I won't; but he said such smart things, Uncle Dick, and talked about subjects that are not interesting to army officers—talked more like a literary man, you know."

"I don't know any literary men, my dear, but I believe *they* talk of publishers."

"He seemed so well informed. He told us a great deal about ancient Norway and the Vikings, and how enterprising they were—their expeditions extended to Constantinople. Did you know that they discovered Iceland, Greenland, and America five hundred years before Columbus?"

"Wonderful people!" exclaimed Enid. "And pray have you discovered who *he* is?"

"No. We are hopelessly in the dark."

"How dull! I hoped you were going to tell us something thrilling; but as you are no wiser than I am myself I won't wait." And with a nod and a smile she rose and went into the garden.

"He is so good-looking in the King Olaf style," continued Dovey, "and most chivalrous and fascinating. I believe he is an author, and has come to this peaceful retreat to write a poem or a play!"

"Oh, how romantic," exclaimed Joan. "What else did he tell you?"

"Let me see, he talked of telepathy and fish-curing, Norwegian legends, Indian magic, and the Empress of China."

"It sounds as if you had been reading aloud the *Encyclopædia Britannica.* Not a word of his own history?"

"No, and we yearn to know more about him," I said; "there are some who tell you far too much about themselves and their affairs; others, who are dumb, excite your maddest interest."

"Like an engrossing serial," supplemented Jack Waller. "You would prefer Prince Charming 'to be continued in our next,' would you not, Miss Bosworth? The unknown has always a certain amount of fascination. Pray, what were King Olaf's views on telepathy?"

"Ah, there I must refer you to Miss Bassett."

"I'm not very clear," she replied in a dreamy tone, "but he declared that people's minds act in a sort of mental Marconi—that certain places and individuals had an irresistible attraction for him—for instance, this very valley holds him by a spell; he

believes that there are people you meet every day, whom you have already come across, in a previous existence."

"Goosey!" exclaimed her uncle. "He was just seeing how much you would stand."

"Do you suppose that you and this too-gifted prince may have met in a former state?" inquired Jack Waller, and his tone was dry.

"I'm sure I cannot tell you," responded Dovey, with a mischievous smile. "I can only say, that I *hope* we are old friends."

"What can he be doing in the valley?" said the General.

"Perhaps he is in hiding," suggested Jack Waller; "it is an A1 place."

"Hiding from whom?"

"His creditors, his enemies, or a—lady?"

"On the contrary," I replied; "he gave me the impression that he was in search of something. I have also given him a general invitation to tea, and if he appears you will all have an opportunity of making up your minds as to whether he is a prince, a pauper, author, soldier, or criminal. At any rate, I have made up *my* mind. I believe he is an officer and gentleman, and I am quite sure I like him."

"I say ditto to Miss Bosworth," cried Dovey, and she shot a defiant glance at our guest from "down

below," as, pushing back her chair, she rose from the table and went into the garden, where Jack immediately followed her, and there no doubt they "had it out!"

CHAPTER XXII

THE LAST STRAW

I THINK I have already described the long verandah facing bridge and road, from which we hailed our successful fishers. At one end of this verandah a little white gate opened down into the so-called "garden," which was railed off from the meadow, and surrounded the house on three sides; this was sheltered on the north by trees, somewhat stunted mountain ash and birch, as they bore the full blast of the winter storms that tore up and down the valley. As for the pretensions of the enclosure to the name of "garden," it had a calm "don't-care-how-I-look or what-do-you-think-of-me" air. "I'm under the snow for seven months; you don't expect *me* to grow strawberries, or roses, or herbaceous borders!" Nevertheless, this wild northern parterre contrived to make a gay show; through the grass were scattered beds, or rather little jungles, of brilliant unknown flowers mixed up with daisies, dog-roses, and Iceland poppies. At one end there were squares

of rhubarb and greatly petted lettuce; it was full of butterflies, and patronised extensively by birds—on the whole a most sociable resort.

Here I had established myself one evening in a crooked cane chair; I was mending a blouse—not mine own—whilst Enid Rivers sat on the grass like a Turkish lady, with a blotter on her lap, attempting to draw my portrait with pen and ink. She was clever at caricature.

"Your nose is quite easy," she remarked; "it is your mouth which is the bother. I'll try you in profile; please turn your face away."

As I obediently turned my face, I caught sight of Dovey flying towards us through the little gate, and, of course, leaving it wide open behind her. Dovey was in the wildest spirits; this was one of her "up" days;—the "down" ones were, alas! sadly numerous.

She danced up to Enid, struck an attitude, and, with much gesticulation, began to quote—

"She sat upon her dobie,
She heard the Nimmak hum,
When all at once a cry arose:
'The Cummerbund has come!'
In vain she fled—with open jaws
The angry monster followed—
And so, before assistance came,
That lady fair was swallowed."

"Ah," exclaimed the other, laying down her pen, "these are, indeed, heavy tidings! Our holidays are

over—Mr. Clegg has returned! Well, if he intends to swallow me I shall stick in his throat. I am determined to have the last word."

"And, at any rate, you are bound to disagree with him!" I remarked. "I suppose he has been asking for Miss Bosworth?"

"No, indeed," rejoined Dovey, "he is entirely taken up with Mrs. Valdy, and seems to be almost suffocated with all the news and gossip he has brought up from Skabo!"

This description was fully borne out by facts. I found something inflated and mysterious in the mien of Mr. Clegg—he scarcely deigned to recognise me, although our little breach had been so beautifully glued and mended that not a soul had ever suspected its existence; but, on the other hand, he held long and grave conversations with Joan.

After supper they strolled down the river together, and I observed that, whilst the lady seemed passive, the gentleman's head and hands were in constant motion, nodding and waggling, as if to underline his information; yes, he was certainly imparting news—important news!

And this news was duly carried to me as I was preparing to retire for the night.

"Rachel," said Joan, seating herself on my bed with the air of a tragedy actress, "Mr. Clegg has been telling me something terrible about Miss Rivers.

Oh," and she actually groaned, "I always had an instinct that I did wrong to take her!"

"Well, you can always fall back heavily on her reference, Mrs. Thoroughgood. What has the girl been doing? You know Mr. Clegg is fond of gossip, and he has a spite against Enid; you will find it is some mistake."

"Oh no, he heard it all at Skabo from the Guises and that Mrs. Deacon, who knew her story. You may remember how the girl lay low on board ship, and never appeared till the moment we landed, and then she wore a veil?"

"Yes, but she was in dreadful trouble."

"She came out here to conceal herself; and well she may," cried Joan, rising to her feet. "Everyone in the valley will soon know who I've taken in, and how I've been taken in."

"Oh, Joan!" I protested.

"Yes, she is not here in her own name! I call it scandalous!"

"Pray how do you know."

"Mr. Clegg was exhibiting his photo groups. You remember those he took of all of us on the steps, and some with fish—and some in a cariole."

"Yes; and he would not pose Miss Rivers with her thirty-six pounder, but only in a cariole. And she made such a nice picture; it turned out the best of all."

"And, as it turned out, betrayed her real identity. He showed it to the Skabo people, and that Mrs. Deacon at once gave a shriek and said, 'What *have* I got here? And what have you up at Randval? No less a personage than the notorious Enid Riversdale!'"

"Riversdale!" I echoed. "Well, she has only dropped half her name. Do you know why?"

"Oh yes; there was a frightful scandal. She had a love affair abroad with a married man, and he committed suicide — shot himself before her very eyes. It was hushed up, but Mrs. Deacon knows all about it; she was in the same hotel. Her people took it terribly to heart—it nearly killed her grandfather. It never got into the Press—not more than a hint in the society papers, such as the *Whisperer*. Oh, it was a shocking business! No wonder the girl is anxious to hide her head, and is ashamed to be seen. Her grandfather is the Marquis of Torrisdale, and he has cast her off—turned her out of doors!"

I must confess my breath was taken away, and yet in my heart I did not believe the tale.

"Yes, I can now see it all, and why Mrs. Thoroughgood was so mysterious, and why I never heard directly from her people," resumed Joan. "It is too bad of her to have thrust a girl with such a past upon *me*."

"What will you do?" I inquired.

"I have implored Mr. Clegg to be silent, at least, till I speak to her, and get her away quietly."

"You cannot send her away till the end of the season—she paid in advance."

"No, I suppose not; and I don't want to speak to her at all. Mr. Clegg is not a bad sort at heart, though you all make such fun of him. For my part, I rather like him."

"Yes, you feel bound to protect the weak. I know the feeling myself, but I cannot endure him."

"Oh, Rachel! to call this my happy valley! now it seems the valley of tears. Here is this horrible story! Mrs. Deacon actually said that Miss Rivers —one of my household—was a murderess; there is Mr. Hopkins making himself a laughing-stock over little Marli; and Dovey is, unless I am mistaken, greatly attracted by a penniless sailor, and he by her, and her mother sent her out here on purpose" —she paused—"to—to——"

"To catch a triton!" I suggested; "and she has caught a minnow."

I went over to a window and looked out; the white mist lay low on the tops of the pine-clad hills —a sad, wailing wind was moaning down the river. One solitary magpie sat perched on the garden fence. No! the valley did not look happy to-night.

"And besides all that," continued Joan, "I hear the

'sickness,' as they call it, is coming. Twenty years ago it carried off nearly the whole population. The people are terrified, and no wonder; they say a boy up beyond the bridge has got it, and that it will certainly come down the river."

"What kind of a sickness, is it infectious?"

"Yes, a fever peculiar to this country."

"Well, there is no need to trouble trouble till trouble troubles us."

"But I am dreadfully troubled, I cannot make up my mind what to do. If I hold my tongue about Miss Rivers, and afterwards it all comes out—as it will—the General will never forgive me; he will say it was so abominable of me to allow Dovey to be intimate with such a person, although she *is* so well-born."

"I cannot help thinking that there is some flaw in the story. Did you ever see any girl who kept more aloof from men?"

"Presumably she has had a lesson," and Joan's tone was surprisingly bitter.

"Shall I speak and hint to her the little tale that Mr. Clegg has carried here?"

"No, I think not; let us wait and see what may happen, and how the situation develops. If it could be tided over for three weeks, it won't matter to me."

Mr. Clegg became very confidential with Joan; he brought her flowers, they had long talks—I knew

what about—but the General was entirely in the dark, and obviously uneasy.

"Your friend is a nice little woman," Mr. Clegg imparted to me; "very clever, head screwed on right way; well connected, too; must have saved; this place pays like smoke. I hear she refused £5,000 for her lease."

As I did not immediately follow his train of thought, he resumed—

"Of course, one need not come out here every year. I should let it, certainly, for the end of the season—say August and September; and the shooting, there's lots of sport up the hills."

I stared so hard that he coloured, and added, "I am only building castles in the air, and thinking what I should do if this place were mine; I am quite fond of it."

"What would you do if it were yours?"

"Well, I'd pull down the great barn opposite."

"And where would you keep the cows and ponies in winter?"

"Oh, the barn might be moved to over there. I'd lay out a garden and croquet-lawn, I'd get a motor-car, and I'd have a lot of rocks put in some of the pools to stop the fish running up. Yes, Burga will be all the better for it; it can be done in winter-time, the ice broken, and the stones brought on sleighs—it would add another hundred fish to our river."

"Who is 'top' just now?"

"The General, then Miss Rivers. I lost ground when I was at Skabo—she has extraordinary luck."

"Oscar says she is the best fisherwoman in Norway."

"Bah! Well, I can tell you one thing—she will never fish *here* again!" and with this announcement, he got up and left me.

I now began to be seriously uneasy, and with good reason;—Joan shut me out of her confidence—and possibly as a compensation, the General took me into his.

"I say, Miss Bosworth," he began suddenly, "have you noticed anything? Our friend Clegg is always posing as master here. He orders the servants about, and sits at the head of the table now!"

"Only because Mrs. Valdy has hurt her hand," I answered in my most soothing manner.

"He is constantly talking of what could be done with the place if it were managed by a *man*."

"Yes, he likes Randval; he says he has fallen in love with it."

"I don't think she would be such a fool," he muttered under his breath; but my ears are sharp, and I heard him.

Mrs. Dering said: "So I hear Mr. Clegg is making great running with Mrs. Valdy. He has been talking to me, and asking all sorts of questions. *He* would like to have the fishing," and she laughed derisively,

"if *she* would have him! They seem to be always together. To-day I saw them returning in a *stolk-jærre*—he was driving and she was carrying a stack of wild flowers. I declare they had quite a bridal air!"

All this time Joan was remarkably distant to Enid, who, noticing the change, said—

"Bozzie, please do tell me, what have I done to Mrs. Valdy?—she is so cool to me; and as to Mr. Clegg, he won't speak to me at all. Of course, I am glad of that; but I wish he would not stare at me so constantly with his dreadful prawn's eyes—he makes me tremble like one of the aspen trees across the river."

I knew the reason only too well, but I prudently held my peace, and the wretched girl rushed on her fate.

One evening we were all sitting in the verandah when Mr. Clegg appeared on foot, followed by his gaffer, with a significantly limp basket.

"No luck," he said, sitting down on the steps, and mopping his face. "I've just lost the biggest fish I've ever been in" (lost fish are always the biggest!). "I was harling on the tail of *Swinberg* and was just on the point of leaving the pool when I felt a good tug, and sure enough I was in my fish."

A sympathetic circle was now assembled around him, including Joan, Oscar, two pony-boys, a farmer

from over the river, Kari, the washerwoman, Dovey, and myself—everyone in the household took a profound interest in our catch. If the dining-room rushed pell-mell to greet the returning conqueror, so also did the kitchen, and I often noticed groups anxiously inspecting and gravely discussing the silver spoil under the cherry trees; but I am interrupting Mr. Clegg.

"I did my level best to keep him in the pool, but I might just as well have tried to control a donkey with my fly. He stayed in the rough water; took me all the way down Staal rapids into Tor water —a good mile. At the end of the rapid I had him done, and was bringing him in to the gaff when my fly broke! He lay on his side, exhausted, but recovered rapidly and swam away—a good forty-five-pounder."

A low murmur of sympathy went round the group. It had hardly died away when the wheels of a *stolkjærre* were heard, and Miss Rivers drove up, her face radiant with smiles. She jumped down, and presently her gaffer lugged out a heavy basket.

"Bring it to the steps," she said, as he was going towards the usual place. With some effort he carried it over as desired, and emptied it at our feet.

There was a loud, unanimous cry. First there came a sea trout, then a nice grilse, finally a monster salmon.

When the uproar of voices had ceased, the General said—

"How *splendid!* The fish of the season! Where did you get him?"

"In the rapid pool below *Swinberg*."

(Could it have been Mr. Clegg's fish?)

Miss Rivers stood up smiling, her gaffer grinning from ear to ear. In a trice a weighing-machine was produced. The creature turned the scale at forty-five pounds!

"Well, I've never caught such a fine fish in all the years I've been in Norway," said the General. "Accept my congratulations; though, mind you, it's not the big fish that give the best sport."

Mr. Clegg made no remark whatever; indeed, he simply glared at the prize in a silence that was ominous, then rose abruptly and stalked into the house.

"Oh, I am so pleased," said Enid, with her hand on my shoulder; "and so happy! and yet"—and her voice sank to a whisper—"I have no right ever to be happy again."

The fish triumph was bad enough, but the unlucky girl went still further; she, so to speak, piled Pelion on Ossa, tempted envious fate, and brought on her head the sword of vengeance.

During supper and breakfast we heard a great deal more respecting Mr. Clegg's lost fish—fifty pounds, if

an ounce—the biggest seen in the Rande for twenty years.

Of course we listened with exemplary patience, for was not Mr. Clegg under Joan's special protection? She declared that we were all prejudiced, and there was no doubt that Dovey and Enid were banded together against him. Since the episode of the photograph Miss Bassett was on cool terms with what she always termed in my hearing "the Clegg," and Enid and the gentleman had never been on any terms at all.

The river was low, sport was indifferent, and the weather oppressively warm. One evening Enid, who had not been fishing, went for a stroll with Dovey. As I reclined in a long chair in the garden, among the Iceland poppies, daisies, and dog-roses, I noticed the two girls walking arm in arm, and occasionally indulging in peals of laughter, and I was very much afraid that there was some conspiracy on foot.

It was after supper, and close on ten o'clock, when we beheld Mr. Clegg arriving back alone. He had taken the short cut, and the *stolkjærre* was not due for some time.

"What have you got?" (the daily question), we bawled to him as he approached.

"Oh, a wretched grilse," he answered, and he sat down on the steps and waited for his "take."

Presently the cart appeared, with the two girls in it, bareheaded; they had waylaid it on the road.

I noticed that the gaffer and pony-boy were grinning, and Mr. Clegg called out in an authoritative voice—

"Take it over there."

They struggled across to the trees with something that seemed as big as a calf, and laid it out with an air of profound respect. Oh, such a huge monster! a very king of salmon!

Mr. Clegg sprang up, bewildered, and stared, and approached the fish with slow and stealthy footsteps, as if he half feared that it would rise and fly away.

We all followed in a sort of "queue," and then collected round the prize, exclaiming, "Oh, the big fish!"

The light was a little dim under the trees, and the General suddenly stooped and gave a sharp ejaculation; then he touched the monster with his foot, and said—

"I say! you two girls have been up to some larks. Why it's the wooden sixty-pounder off the dairy door!"

And so it was! Merely the monument of a former triumph.

We had been nicely taken in. The girls had smuggled the impostor into the cart as it passed behind the barn.

Everyone enjoyed this little joke except Mr. Clegg. Even in the dim light beneath the cherry trees I

could discern that his mien was truly fearsome, his brow as black as night.

He exploded to Joan that same hour, and assured her that he would no longer screen Miss Rivers, that he intended to tell the General, Mr. Hopkins, and the Derings all about her, and declared that Mrs. Valdy must tackle the young woman herself, and at once!

Mr. Clegg faithfully kept his word. The very next afternoon the General was in full possession of the story, which he was by no means inclined to believe. —Mr. Hopkins, too, was also informed, but was too stricken with his own sorrows to care.

Then Joan came to me after tea in the garden, and, to my great alarm, said: "I am about to bring her out here, and speak to her before *you*, Rachel, for you were with me when she was forced on me, and you have always been more or less her friend."

"Don't, for heaven's sake!" I cried, half rising; "I hate scenes!"

"Yes, I shall—you must back me up," she answered, and in another moment I saw her returning, through the white gate, followed by the culprit, who little dreamt of what was awaiting her.

"Will you please sit down?" said Joan, dragging up a third basket-chair. "I want to speak to you particularly."

"Yes, I know, Mrs. Valdy, about our joke with the

wooden salmon. I am so sorry, but really we heard so much of Mr. Clegg's big fish that——"

"You are mistaken," interposed Joan, and her face was sternly set. "It is something much more serious, Miss Riversdale."

"Oh!" and she started and turned white. All the pretty colour and smiles had fled out of her face. "That is a name I never wish to hear in Norway. Who told you? How *did* you discover it?"

"I heard it from Mr. Clegg!"

CHAPTER XXIII

TWO STORIES

"AND what did Mr. Clegg tell you?" asked the girl, with a tremble in her voice.

"He told me your story," responded Joan, with measured emphasis; "he heard it at the Guises; they recognised your face in his groups of photographs."

"Mr. Clegg's portraits are as dangerous as dynamite!"

"That may be," said Joan; "but do you think it was right to come here under a false name?"

"Perhaps I was wrong—yes, I was wrong; but I cannot see that it has done anyone harm."

"It will do great harm to *me*. It will go far and wide, and be telephoned up and down the valley that I have a lady here who is not what she pretends to be—has come with a false name—and is under a cloud. I have always been so very careful."

"I am really respectable, I do assure you, Mrs. Valdy. I am here by Mrs. Thoroughgood's wish. I

came to escape from myself, and, thanks be to God and Miss Bosworth, I have escaped."

"You cannot get away from your past!"

"Who can? What has Mr. Clegg discovered of my affairs?"

"That you were mixed up in some dreadful business about a suicide."

Miss Riversdale's pale face became ghastly; she pressed her hand convulsively to her face as she faltered, "Yes, I was."

"And you came, and hid yourself *here!*"

"That is true, but I have done no one any injury, and it has done me much good. As for Mr. Clegg, his stories are not always to be relied on, are they?"

"Is there ever smoke without a fire?"

"Hateful saying! You wish me to leave, of course, and I will do so; I can go to the Skyds station, and I daresay Mr. Clegg would like my rod. By-and-by Mrs. Thoroughgood will tell you the truth about me."

"I do not wish you to leave at present. No use locking the stable-door now; there is no direct boat for a fortnight, and as to the Skyds station up the valley there is a fever close by, which is most infectious."

"Thank you, but I would rather go," she said stiffly. "I am spreading moral infection in your house."

"But, Miss Riversdale, is it not a fact that a man killed himself because of you? that your grandfather and aunt have been dreadfully distressed, and sent you away from home?"

"Part of the story is true; it was not my fault—the—the death; I say so in justice to myself—though"—and she drew herself up, and looked into Joan's square, stern face—"you will not believe me."

"I"—and she hesitated—"would wish to believe you—for I like you—but the stories from Mrs. Deacon and Lady Guise—are—a—a——"

"Yes, I know; Mrs. Deacon was in the hotel. She and my aunt by marriage were close friends. She had it—the envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness—at first hand."

"You may stay till we leave," said Joan; "I've known this for some days, and I would not have mentioned it, but Mr. Clegg insisted on its being published—he thought it right."

"How like him! Well, I apologise to you, Mrs. Valdy, for coming here with half a name, but so far, I trust, you will admit that I have done nothing to stain it. If it will afford you any pleasure to know it, your Happy Valley has been a haven to me, but I shall leave it at the first opportunity. I daresay Oscar, who is so wise, may find me some route by which I can immediately return to England." And she moved away, and went slowly out of the

garden with the pride, grace, and composure of the great lady.

I followed her at once, and said: "Get your hat from the hall and come with me for a walk—and a talk."

"I——" she hesitated, and looked at me gravely, her great dark eyes were brimming with tears. "Yes, I will, and I will tell you all about this cloud, as Mrs. Valdy calls it, that has darkened my days."

In a few minutes we were walking down the road at a brisk pace.

"Poor Mrs. Valdy!" she exclaimed; "her valley is losing its good name. First of all, Dovey's affair; then Mr. Hopkins's unrequited passion for little Marli—a topic to last for years; finally, my disgrace and banishment! Oh, I wonder at myself making a joke of it," she added, as she took my arm. "Aunt Fred always complained of my incurable frivolity of mind. Now let us walk very slowly. Please do not look at me, and I will tell you *why* I am here."

It was a beautiful clear evening, not a star in the heavens, no moon to be seen, only the great soft light of the northern sun. From a distant farm across the river came the faint sound of a guitar.

Presently she began. "My grandfather, as perhaps you may know, is the Marquis of Torrisdale. He is now an infirm old man. He had two sons—my father was the eldest and the favourite; he and my

mother were drowned in a yacht when I was but a year old. Granddad and grannie took me home and adopted me. I lived with them always, and, oh! I had such a happy life; it seems as if I had lived in another planet. I never went to school, but had governesses, for they could not bear me out of their sight. Granddad taught me to fish and ride and drive. I was his companion. Grannie was very stately, but, oh! so sweet to me; I just adored her." And here she came to a full stop, and drew a long, long sigh. "Oh, if grannie had been alive——" and her voice broke.

"Let us sit down here on these flat logs," I suggested; "we can talk better so."

"Grannie's second son, Uncle Fred," she resumed, placing herself beside me, "was what is called 'wild' —they were always paying his debts; he drank, and he liked low company, and when hardly one-and-twenty, he married. I believe, though I was never told, that she was on the stage, and her people were very, very common. Granddad and grannie were so furious—grannie especially—they never would receive her; but, of course, Uncle Fred, being the heir, received a large income. Then, rather suddenly, he died, leaving two girls who were much older than me, and the next heir was Cousin Gilfrid, a captain in the Blue Lancers. Granddad did not like it, but it could not be helped; Gilfrid was bound to come into the title and the place. Lady Fred wrote some-

times to grannie—humble, fawning, clever letters. She and her girls (whose photographs she sent at interyals) were living near Aldershot, and it appeared that they had made acquaintance with Gilfrid—their cousin—and he had been immensely struck with Lucinda, the youngest. This, of course, was private, and only for dear grannie's ear, but I was her secretary, as her sight was bad, and Lady Fred hinted strongly that to clinch the affair officially they ought to meet at Court Place. Well, grandpapa was all for it. Lucinda was his own grandchild—her other parent's father had kept a low public-house—and it would be such a splendid thing for the place to go, so to speak, in the family."

"Yes," I assented, "I can see that!"

"Well, they were invited, and they arrived! Christmas was always a great festival, and we had the house crammed to the garrets. First came Aunt Fred, fair and faded, with a slim figure and a soft voice, but, oh! such sly eyes! She must have been extremely pretty once. She was beautifully dressed, and laid herself down as a sort of doormat for the 'grands' to wipe their shoes on. The girls were distinctly plain, rather red shiny noses and light eyelashes, very thin and subdued and genteel, and I think a little awed by the huge house and the crowd of smart servants. They had two topics—dress and men, men and dress. I amazed them! I was too lively and outspoken, and full of the *joie de vivre!*

Poor you," she said suddenly; "I must hurry, or you will be going to sleep."

"No, no!" I protested; "I am listening to every word."

"Then Gilfrid came. We had never met, and were agreeably and mutually surprised. He was, oh! so good-looking, and such a dear; ready to do anything, always cheery and thoughtful! He helped to make the Christmas go off like a catherine-wheel, and—and—he fell in love with *me*." Here she paused for a moment. "When I touched on his *penchant* for Lucinda he was quite indignant. He had merely been civil to them when they had claimed relationship, and had given them a dinner and a play, and sent the girls flowers. At the bare idea of marrying anyone he simply laughed. But that was only the first three days. We soon became excellent friends. Yes, the grands were delighted with him; he was a Torrisdale in looks, I am not: I had a Spanish ancestress. He rode splendidly, and led the cotillion, and acted in the theatricals, and dressed up as Father Christmas. Oh, he was a tremendous success, and carried all before him. He dared to kiss me under the mistletoe, and I boxed his ears soundly; but we made it up and went hunting together. I am sure Aunt Fred did not approve of me; Gilfrid paid me far too much attention, but she clung to the fiction about Lucinda. Nothing definite was said or done, and then they went away. The grands gave the

girls nice presents, but thought them rather terrible, especially grannie. She said they looked like little under-housemaids in their Sunday clothes. Well, Gilfrid came back for more hunting, and he returned again in summer, for no ostensible reason but to see me; and he and I—well, those"—her voice shook—"were happy days. He told the grands, and asked if we might be married and go to India, and they said, 'Most certainly not.' I was only nineteen and a half, and was all they had left; and he could never be so cruel as to steal me! But they both liked him, oh! ever so much, and granddad told him all he wanted done to the estate, and how it was to be kept up—some day.

"Gilfrid and I were not formally engaged, but we were to be allowed to write. His regiment was in India, stationed at Meerut, and when he had to sail alone it nearly broke my heart. That was my first trouble. Then they all crowded in! Gilfrid was to come home in two years, and then we might be engaged, but meanwhile I gave him a lock of my hair and my best photograph, and he gave me lots of things and his dog. Tell me," she asked abruptly, "are you sick of this?"

"No, no; go on," I urged. "I am deeply interested."

"That autumn grannie died suddenly—she had some sort of stroke, I think—she was making tea at breakfast, and at night she was gone from us. Oh!

it was such a shock, and such a loss. It nearly killed granddad. They had been married fifty years: and she was so clever and so good; I can't tell you how everyone missed her. Poor granddad, he began to what is called 'break' after this, and he looked so ill and so feeble the doctors said he ought to go abroad to the south of France for the winter; and so we went, he and I, and his invaluable man, Price, and my maid, and one or two servants. At first, Lady Seabourne—that's my cousin—advised a villa, but afterwards a first floor in a hotel, and we took a suite in one on the outskirts of Mentone. You know it, of course?"

"Yes, I know every stone of the Riviera."

"We arrived in January; it was all delightful—the sea and sun and flowers. Although I was in mourning for gran, my spirits were always bubbling up. Of course, I did not go out to dances, only to teas and picnics with my cousin, Sally Seabourne, and half my time I spent driving with granddad and amusing him. We met various friends—the place was crammed—and then Aunt Fred and the girls suddenly descended on us, and came to the same hotel; and she soon persuaded granddad to allow her to share some of our rooms and servants. And she—you see, he was getting a little weak and forgetful—established a wonderful ascendency over him; she taught him card games, which they played together for hours. She could not bear *me*, of course

(she had heard all about Gilfrid), but she dissembled and pretended to be most affectionate. Oh! she was so clever and so scheming, and contrived to take my place in the daily drive, telling everyone that it was to release me, as if I did not enjoy being with the dear old man, who had been good to me all my life, and whom I loved! Of course, we knew numbers of men, and among them a French count, who took a dreadful fancy to *me*—I can call it nothing else. He was really my shadow, and I did not like it, for I was rather afraid of him, he was so excitable, so emotional, and so *empressé;* and though good-looking, he had such wild eyes, and the effect of these and his hair *en brosse* was sometimes quite too startling! I had plenty of other friends, but the Frenchman never let me out of his sight—it began to be rather disagreeable. Sally Seabourne was ill and in bed. When I spoke to her she merely said, 'Oh, my dear, send him away, don't let him haunt you,' and she laughed. Easier said than done! There was no use in appealing to granddad now, poor soul, and as to Aunt Fred, she simply encouraged the count. If I went into the grounds, he was there. If I looked out of my window, he was there, and he asked me to marry him every time we met. It became a cruel persecution, but I was ashamed to make a fuss, although I was most wretched. Of course, I always said '*No*,' and one day we had a truly frightful scene in the garden—precisely like what you would see on the

stage! Only we were in deadly earnest. He was so noisy and so insistent that I really became desperate, and grew angry, and told him he was making me miserable. I'm sure people heard and saw. Anyway, we were the talk of the 'Como' and of five hundred people, and, unfortunately, I had no one to stand by me—no one of weight and rank. Aunt Fred and the girls enjoyed it, and talked of it, and made it worse than ever. I could not worry poor granddad, and I was ashamed to speak to Lord Seabourne. Sally had gone for a change to Corsica. Finally, I told the count that I would not be persecuted, and commanded —implored—him to leave me alone. I said I'd never speak to him again. That very afternoon I was walking in the grounds with a girl when he suddenly waylaid me, looking terrible, and shouted: 'You never speak to me again!' He had something in his hand, and I saw a flash and heard a report; he had fired at me,—just grazed my cheek. Then another report, and he tumbled down at my feet, shot through the head; his blood spattered all over my white dress—oh, I can see it all now!" She spoke with a low, intense emphasis, then turned away shuddering and buried her face in her hands. After a moment she looked up at me and continued: "I fainted, and when I came to, I was ill for days in my room, simply prostrate. When I had recovered sufficiently to get about again, I thought that, though people might be sorry for the poor man, they would be a little sorry

for me also! No, seemingly with one consent, they were every one against me. Lady Fred had been inventing lies, and these lies had a week's start. Whilst I was in my room she had spread reports of how I had had secret meetings with the count, and had led him on, and kept him off, and played 'cat and mouse,' and driven him to distraction and death. Lady Fred had made poor old granddad understand this, and most of my friends too. I saw everyone looking and pointing and drawing themselves away, or turning suddenly into shops or doorways. And the story in the local paper had been posted to Gilfrid. 'A lover fires at a heartless beauty and then kills himself at her feet.' (I believe Lady Fred put it in!) And also Lady Fred had written. At last I got to England more dead than alive. The Freds travelled with us. She took my place, and became granddad's companion. Though once or twice, when I stole in to see him, he cried, poor old darling, and said, 'Oh, Enid, I want *you*, though you are so wicked!' I was far too weak to stand against Lady Fred, but I wrote a long letter to Gilfrid, and told him all. And then I collapsed, and had some sort of fever, and nearly died. The old servants wrote to Lady Seabourne about me, and at once she came down and made a fuss, and so did Mrs. Thoroughgood. But all the county had heard what a wretch I had been, and Lady Fred never allowed my dear old friends to see me. However, Mrs. Thoroughgood

simply carried me off. I believe she thought my mind was going, and it was—my friends alienated, Gilfrid never writing to me, and that horrible scene to think of every night. I felt, though I knew I was not to blame, that the poor man's infatuation for me had cost his life. Yes, I have his blood on my head —the same as it was in reality, all over my gown. Oh, it is an awful sensation! My memory is a scourge."

"But he was mad," I protested. "Of that I am confident; and as to the stories, of course Lady Fred invented them to ruin you, in order to step into your shoes."

"Well, she has done that most effectually! I hope Gilfrid will never marry Lucinda, and, oh! I feel so heartbroken for my dear old granddad; he must wonder where I am and why I have left him? However, I am strong now, and don't dream of that face. I shall return home in spite of Aunt Fred.—I think I have some friends still."

"You never write to them or receive letters?"

"No; the doctors forbade it most strictly: no one knows where I am; this is a 'rest cure.' I am to have no link whatever with the outside world, and I fought so hard not to come, but I know Mrs. Thoroughgood and Sally were right; they were inflexible, it has done me good; and I no longer feel as if I was sinking into idiocy, and no longer see that

awful sight. But of course I am always thinking of Gilfrid; he had ample time to write before they put me away here."

"Perhaps not; don't be too sure."

Then suddenly leaning against me, she said, "If Gilfrid does not come back to me, and I may not return to granddad, what is the good of living? Tell me *that!*" and she shook with the vehemence of her feelings.

"My dear girl, you must make the best of life!"

"Oh, it is easy for you to say so," she murmured, as she drew away and pressed her hands to her eyes.

"Enid," I said, "it is not so easy for *me* to say that as you imagine. I have listened to your story, and I should like to tell you *mine.*"

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "I always thought there was one—it is in your face!"

"To begin with, I was more fortunate than you, for my mother lived till I was eighteen—she died of a neglected cold, and my father and I were desolate. All my life I remembered Edgar Lawrence. When I was a tiny child he was a middy. He used to play with me, tease me, and I adored him; when I grew up, he adored *me.* We were engaged for three years, and though my father was a little against my being a sailor's wife, yet he loved Edgar like a son. They say that all men and many women are like apples—with a beautiful rind, but corrupt inside. Now, Edgar

was sound through and through to the core. He was a popular, smart officer, first lieutenant on the *Caspar*. She was returning from China, and we were to be married as soon as she went out of commission; father wished it, his own health was so frail. My wedding presents were coming in, my dress and *trousseau* were in hand. Edgar had been promised an excellent five years' appointment after fifteen years at sea. Well, one day a foreign telegram came to father. I was sitting on the arm of his chair as he read it. I half hoped that it might be from Edgar—of course I was counting the hours till I saw him. I looked over dad's shoulder, and before he could crush up the paper I had read: 'St. Helena. Bad news; Lawrence drowned.' I did not believe it—I would not believe—and no one could make me believe it. Then the *Caspar* arrived at Portsmouth, and the captain came up to see us, and brought the story himself. On a dark night, in a gale, a seaman fell overboard, and Edgar, who was on watch, instantly gave the alarm, and went after him. The sea was mountains high, no boat could be launched—the captain dared not risk more lives. They threw lines and burnt a searchlight, and caught a glimpse of Edgar—he and the sailor were clinging to a buoy. He waved them a farewell, and then my fate and my life went down in the Atlantic."

"Oh, poor Miss Bosworth!" she exclaimed. "Oh,

poor Rachel!" and she flung her arms round me and pressed her lips to mine, and I could feel the hot tears trickling down her face.

Suddenly, amid the profound stillness of that summer's night, we heard heavy footsteps rapidly approaching, and started almost guiltily apart.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE NEW NURSE

THE approaching footsteps were those of Toby Hopkins, who came swinging along at a great pace—I think he was walking away from the image of Marli; he seemed absorbed and preoccupied, and gave a violent start, when he came on us standing together by the logs.

"Oh, hallo!" he exclaimed; then something seemed to flash into his mind, and he looked straight at Miss Rivers, and, holding out his great hand, said: "Well, Miss Rivers—dale, I don't hold with cat-woman talk. Miss Bosworth here can tell you that I am a blundering, thundering idiot."

"No, she can't," I interrupted. "She flatly refuses to back up any such statement."

"Well, anyhow, I back *you* up, Miss Rivers—dale," he said; "and if you want me to punch any fellow's head, you'll find me all there! I am going for a tramp—good night!" and with a snatch at his cap he was gone.

"A champion!" I exclaimed. "A champion!"

"Yes," she answered hysterically; "and a fine, straightforward, honest gentleman. I'm glad Marli would not have him. I think she is a little minx!"

"I'm afraid she must have given him encouragement; he is so humble-minded and shy."

"I am rather sorry now that he and I pulled Mr. Clegg out of the river. Oh no, I'm not. What a dreadful thing to say! Let us go for a tramp too, and walk as far as the dancing-house."

The dancing-house was about a mile further on—a square, wooden erection, painted bright orange, picked out with blue. It consisted of a little entrance-hall and one big, square room, and stood inside a neat paling surrounded with low bushes.

"I could not go back yet," she continued. "I don't want to return and face them all. Oh, I should like to walk miles and miles to-night."

"But not with *me*, my dear," I protested; "you shall return and eat your supper, and I will back you up in the absence of the champion. If Mr. Clegg throws down a gage or challenge, you may leave him in my hands."

"I don't expect the General will allow Dovey to speak to me. I must get away; I am sure Oscar can manage it. Oh, look! here," and she pointed, "is the farm where the fever is so bad," and she halted and pointed to a rough two-storied log house which stood some way beneath us, and between the road and the river. From a bank a little distance

from us a group of women were holding a loud parley with an aged creature, who in reply to their questions sent up feeble and evidently unsatisfactory replies.

"They are asking for the patients," said Enid, springing away from me. "Come along and hear how they are."

I gathered that the children and their mother were down with the sickness these twelve days, and the aged grandmother, their sole nurse, was evidently completely worn out.

Tears rolled down her wrinkled cheeks as she said: "Anna and Johan are better, but little Peder I think will die, and so will I! I have not slept for four nights."

There was a loud, sympathetic murmur from the listeners, but no offer of help. Who would enter a plague-stricken house? The sickness had filled one hundred graves one year, the very name of it made people look grave.

"Is there no chance of a nurse?" I asked, coming forward as I spoke.

"No, not at present. Folk are sick in so many places; the valley nurse has three houses she goes to up the river. This is too far, also they are poor."

"I have it," exclaimed Enid, seizing my arm; "here it is—the *open door!* I shall do nurse, and give that old grannie a rest. Yes! I see you are going to object, but listen! I am quite capable and

efficient. I've had experience with the grands, and I learned a good deal from a hospital sister who was once at Court Place. She said I was an apt pupil. I like nursing; I am fond of children——"

"This is absolute madness," I broke in; "I shall not allow it."

"All the same, dear, I am going to do it. I have been weak, but you will find I am now very strong. Here is a case where I can be of use. The valley has been good to me; I wish to do something for the valley."

"Yes, but you shall not risk your life for a sentiment."

"Why not? And if, as they say, I was the means of a loss of life, *here* is my chance to redeem it. I will venture myself gladly. I've no fear; and if I do die—but I don't believe I shall—see that I am buried in Norway, in the little churchyard at Tor, on the slope facing the river."

"If anyone is to volunteer, I shall," I said. "Yes, and I will go. I am double your age, your life is before you. Think of Gilfrid."

"He would not hold me back; and, as to your volunteering, excuse me, but you are too absurd. You are not robust; you know nothing about nursing or taking temperature or making barley water and broth, much less beds. No, listen, please," and she pulled out a little diary and began to scribble. "I want all these things from the shop first thing

to-morrow; they are to dump them here on the bank, under the bushes, and I will fetch them; also, I'm making a list of my own things I want sent down to-night by a pony-boy, also to the bushes," pointing as she spoke; "two dark linen gowns, some big white aprons from Crabbe, or others, eau de Cologne, a fan, my watch, handkerchiefs; here is the list. Ask Oscar to telephone to the doctor, and say that I must see him to-morrow."

"Do you mean to tell me you are going now—*now?*" I stammered.

"Yes, at once; it is now—now—that I am wanted. I shall sit up to-night, and—yes, Bozzie, I see you are vexed, but you must do *your* share. Come here, then, every day at a certain hour, say four o'clock, and talk to me, and I will dash out then, and meet you. Now go, dear and kindest friend." And she put her arm about me, and kissed me for the second time that evening.

When it was explained to the bystanders that all this excited argument between the Englanders meant that one of them was going to nurse the sick house, great was their amazement. They fell back and stared, and one weather-beaten woman laid her arm on Enid and said: "Oh, you are young; be wise and stay. Those will die; nothing can save them Why make another grave?"

The old woman below was speedily made aware of the volunteer by three officious people speaking

all at once, and then Enid ran quickly down the slope, and, after a moment's parley, turned about with the aged matron, and, taking her by the hand and talking all the time, hurried her back to the house.

As they entered and the door closed on them, there was an audible exclamation of dismay and wonder among the eager watchers on the mound beside me. It was as if the tall young Englander lady had closed the door of her own vault.

I hastened homewards in a state of extreme mental disorder, but my wits had not altogether deserted me. I interviewed Oscar and told him the truth. At first he held up his hands in amazement, and then said: "Right! right! I always thought she was a splendid young lady. I will get the boy and send off the bundle. My wife will lend aprons, and, yes, saucepans too. Those people are very poor. The man is dead, and the women mind the farm. Also I will telephone to the doctor."

In a surprisingly short time I had got hold of the pony-boy, and given him the bundle and a kroner; then I went into the dining-room in quest of something to eat.

Supper was over, and the company (which included "the people from below") were sitting about the large room, the men smoking, and all talking.

When I entered Joan cried, "I began to think you were lost; we finished supper half an hour ago, but

have kept you something"; and she went to the table, and began to collect various tempting morsels for my ready palate.

"Pray, what have you done with Miss Rivers?" asked Dovey. "Is not she coming to supper?"

"No," I replied, now preparing to cast a bomb. "We walked down to the farm, opposite the dancing-house, where the fever is so bad; yes, they are afraid to have dances; and she has established herself there —as nurse!"

"What?" exclaimed Joan, suddenly throwing down the carving-knife; "you are not in earnest?"

"But I am, indeed, very much in earnest."

"Oh! Rachel, how could you allow it?"

(There it was! I was looked upon as everyone's keeper! Confidante, friend, and chaperon to the entire community.)

"Impossible to prevent her; I really did all I could. I protested. She declares that she is a competent nurse, and likes nursing. Certainly she, or someone, was badly needed; the old woman is worn out, and one of the children is dying."

"But how did it happen? What put it into her head?"

"We heard the people calling out to one another, and Miss Rivers was attracted to the spot, and said she would volunteer!"

"Did she say anything else?" asked Joan, eyeing me steadily.

"Yes," I replied, "she said it was an open door."

"An open door!—what an odd way of putting it," exclaimed Mrs. Dering. "As if every door in the valley is not wide open to Miss Rivers."

"She is a splendidly plucky girl," said Jack Waller, "I should be proud if she were my sister."

"Plucky or not, she cannot return here," remarked Mr. Clegg, with considerable satisfaction. "She is now in quarantine for—weeks."

"Oh, yes," I said, "she is perfectly conscious of that. By the way, I wonder who will have her fishing? I suppose she leaves it as a sort of bequest —eh, Joan?"

Joan was looking both grim and uneasy. Perhaps she was regretting certain things she had said? Perhaps she was thinking of Mrs. Thoroughgood?

"I shall see her to-morrow," I continued; "and will let you *all* know her wishes, and the name of her legatee."

"I propose that we draw lots for the rod," suggested Mr. Clegg; "and how can you possibly see her, Miss Bosworth?"

"I shall go down to the bank and harangue her from there, at four o'clock; it is a rendezvous."

"I should like to come too," said Dovey. "I'll accompany you, of course."

"And I," echoed Mrs. Dering.

"Well, you must make your own appointments.

This is mine, and I refuse to share it. We may have our secrets."

"They can't be *very* private," argued Jack Waller, "when you shout them at the top of your voices on the roadside. I shall come and listen!"

"Many things that are secrets are shouted on the housetops," I retorted, and I looked steadily into Mr Clegg's prominent, greenish eyes. He did not wince, as I half expected, but merely stretched out his hand, and helped himself to a macaroon.

CHAPTER XXV

BRANKSOME OF MEERUT

EACH afternoon four o'clock found me waiting on the bank by the bushes, one hundred yards from the road; generally Dovey accompanied me, and we brought little parcels, commissions, and jokes, and alternately harangued Enid, who stood below us, more or less transformed by a dark cotton gown, a great white apron, and a jaunty little cap. She looked pale, but wonderfully well and in excellent spirits. Her patients were recovering, she informed us; indeed, the woman was sitting up, and all had turned the corner. She and the doctor were on splendid terms, and he had asked her if she would accept a post as nurse at Christiania.

"I might do worse, if the worst comes to the worst——" and she looked at me with peculiar significance. She assured us when we clamoured at her, that she went for a constitutional each evening by the river and watched the fish rising, and had handed over her rod and rights to Mr. Hopkins; she also endowed him with her lucky fly!

Naturally this generosity afforded Mr. Clegg food for some rather spiteful speculation, though he said nothing to *me*. There was a certain amount of, well, not exactly coolness between Joan and myself, but we no longer told everything to one another, and I was alive to the fact that Mr. Clegg said a great deal to her; he had her ear, and hoped—unless I was much mistaken—to have her hand as well. She certainly befriended him, for she looked on the poor gentleman as a rather misused party—her natural instinct was the noble one of taking the weaker side.

One evening we were all having tea in the garden. Joan was in the act of pouring out, when, with the teapot still poised in her hand, she exclaimed, "Why, *who* is this?"

Dovey and I looked over the little white gate just in time to see Crabbe ushering in "the stranger." He came forward completely at his ease; his manners were as distinguished as his appearance was attractive. I immediately rose to greet him, and said—

"Joan, this is the gentleman who rowed us down the river one evening. I asked him to come and see us."

"Of course," he said, "Mrs. Valdy's name is a household word in the valley," and he bowed. "My name is Branksome—Captain Branksome. As I passed along the road and saw you all sitting out

here, and as you were kind enough"—addressing himself to me—"to say that I might call, I could not resist the temptation, and ventured to come in."

"Very pleased to see you," said Joan, who was, I could see, much impressed by this handsome visitor. "Let me introduce you to Miss Bassett, General Bassett, Mr. Clegg, and Mr. Waller." And having effected these introductions, she said, "Pray sit down and have some tea. You are at the Skyds station"—a sort of Norwegian dak-bungalow—"up the valley. Have you had any sport?"

"No," he answered, rising to hand cups, while Mr. Clegg sat stolid and immovable. "I fancy I am the one person in the valley who does *not* fish."

"There is one other," I interposed—"myself."

"Are you a literary man?" asked Mr. Clegg, and his tone was brusque. "Do you write?"

"I"—staring hard—"write!"—then with a sudden laugh, "Good heavens! no—not even a telegram, if I can help myself."

"Oh, then I suppose you are an ornithologist? It is an interesting study."

"Well, I cannot exactly call myself that," he said, stirring his tea (men generally take sugar); "but I am rather interested in curious specimens," and he looked Mr. Clegg over with his dark, steady eyes.

"Then I can tell you an odd thing," resumed Mr. Clegg. "I know of an oyster-catcher, so called, of

course, because it never catches an oyster"—here he came to a full stop, awaiting smiles,—"and a plover, who have actually laid in the same nest."

"Indeed, how strange! And what's the upshot? Do they sit together, or go on duty turn about?"

"I've often watched to see, and I've never yet discovered who is looking after the eggs!"

"Why," exclaimed Captain Branksome, with a broad smile, "I could tell you *that!* Surely you are looking after them yourself!"

Dovey and Mr. Waller laughed aloud, but Mr. Clegg frowned; and then he said in an off-hand way, twirling his eyeglass—

"By-the-by, I seem to know your name quite well. What Branksome are you? Branksome of Mottisfont?"

"No."

Mr. Clegg gazed at him interrogatively; his expression plainly said, "I wonder who you are! Who are you?"

Possibly the visitor guessed that his new acquaintance kept a supply of questions bottled up for use, and meeting his gaze, with direct confident eyes, he said, "I am Branksome of Meerut."

"Meerut!" with a puzzled air. "Do you mean *India?*" and he looked supremely scornful.

Branksome of Meerut nodded a nonchalant assent, and turning round to Joan, said, "You, of course,

are interested in salmon, Mrs. Valdy; your fame as a fisherwoman has gone far!"

Joan coloured and looked gratified, and before she could respond, the General, who was a fish fanatic, interposed—

"As for birds, the habits of salmon are far more interesting to anyone that studies them seriously. A salmon has a high sense of honour."

Here Dovey burst into an audible and derisive titter.

"Yes," he continued, "no fish will ever take another fish's stone; but the moment he is caught, his place is occupied. They are wise, too, and they have their own ideas of discipline. I was leaning over the bridge the other evening and I saw a number of them dressed in line, just like soldiers on parade, with one very big fellow in the middle. I tossed a crumb of bread. One was sent forward as scout. He evidently reported unfavourably, for not a fin stirred."

"I wonder they are ever caught," exclaimed the visitor. "I believe it is a fact that they don't feed in the rivers. I suppose they take the fly from sheer bravado or impudence?"

"Oh, there are various suggestions — hunger, curiosity, annoyance," rejoined the General.

"By the way, Mrs. Valdy," resumed Captain Branksome, "I understand that you have a wonder-

ful fishing lady here, the sensation of the valley! People up at the Skyds station were full of her exploits—four salmon in one morning! I think"—and he glanced to Dovey—"you said that *you* were not very lucky."

"No, indeed, it is not me! You must guess again!" and she shook her head playfully.

"Yes, it was one of my rods," admitted Joan; "she really is extraordinary. At present she is absent; she has volunteered to nurse a bad fever case in the valley, and has been gone a week or more."

"She certainly is an astounding young person!" added Mr. Clegg, "and will do anything to enjoy a little notoriety—anything to be different from the common herd."

"Oh, really," said the visitor, "she must be indeed original; to desire the notoriety of nursing a fever case, especially in this part of the world, where it must be a deadly form of—did you say enjoyment?"

"The less *said* of this young lady the better," declared Mr. Clegg, with malignant significance. "She has a—past, and she came into the valley under peculiar circumstances, in fact, under false pretences, and we all know that she has undertaken this job as —a penance."

Captain Branksome started and uttered a half-stifled exclamation.

"Oh, Mr. Clegg," protested Mrs. Dering, her cheeks glowing with indignation, "how can you? Please don't include us in the 'all.'"

And now Joan, fearing an acrimonious altercation, suddenly asked her visitor if he would not like to walk round and inspect her beds of lettuces. "I am so proud of my lettuces," she added, with well-affected enthusiasm. "The envy of the valley."

By-and-by the pair returned, talking most amicably, and presently Captain Branksome prepared to take leave.

"If you find it so dull at the Skyds station, do come down again, and have dinner or supper—we dine at two," said hospitable Joan.

"Oh, I am not there now, I have moved up to Tiscoe, to my relative; he would not hear of my staying below. I'd no idea he was in these parts. It's been a mutual suprise."

"It's rather a tight fit, is it not?" said the General. "I know Tiscoe of old; you must sleep in the pantry!"

"Oh, I'm an old campaigner," and he laughed; "so are you, General. I remember you at Jellunder, and though a subaltern will naturally remember his General of division, the General is not likely to recall the humble subaltern."

"What's your regiment?"

"The Brabant Lancers."

"Ah, yes, they were out with me. And you're still in the service?—you lucky man!"

"No, I've just sent in my papers; I shall be gazetted out next week, I am sorry to say," and he took a somewhat abrupt departure.

Why was he leaving the service? What was he doing in the valley? *Here* were questions for Mr. Clegg; but he merely drew a long breath, and, turning round, announced to us all, "I believe that fellow is one of the good Branksomes, the Roxholme people; and unless I'm greatly mistaken, he is the next heir to Lord Torrisdale. Yes, I declare," he added, as he watched the lithe, active figure moving off under the trees, "there goes the future marquis."

"'Nine-and-twenty knights of fame,
Hang their shields in Branksome Hall,'

quoted Dovey, following the visitor with her bright dancing eyes. "Don't you think," flashing them swiftly on Jack, "that he looks the chieftain of them all?"

"Can't say. The only chieftain I ever met was dressed in beads, and very drunk," rejoined the sailor, who was obviously—and foolishly—jealous.

"What is he doing in the valley?" said Mr. Clegg, and to this question the sole answer was an ignorant silence.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE QUEST ENDS

IT was evident that our neighbourhood had a curious fascination for "the stranger," as Dovey and I still called him, for the very next afternoon he was once more at Randval, and happened to descry us as we were gathering flowers on the slope above the house.

"May I come up and lend a hand?" he inquired, and we said—

"Yes, by all means, as many hands as you like."

I must confess we found him an excellent and industrious auxiliary, and in a short time he had collected a bunch twice as big as ours. By-and-by he beguiled us to roam further up the hillside, over mossy swamps, along narrow cattle paths, in and out through the trees and boulders — it was a delightful and adventurous ramble. Captain Branksome dragged me, and Dovey dragged herself, to a crag, from which we surveyed the valley beneath us.

"If you'd only come a mile further you would be

on the top," he urged persuasively, "and then you'd see a chain of lakes and the *sæters*, and you can pick some of the so-called Alpine 'flora' and talk of mountaineering. Think of that!"

But I had come far enough. My boots and petticoat were soaking wet, and though I had enjoyed the walk immensely, I had to consider my forty-one years.

As we scrambled down, we came upon many cattle in the woods—cows with such long, white, dismal faces, and careworn, steady little calves. This was the result, no doubt, of being shut up in dark byres for eight of the twelve months.

At last we reached the road, a little way below our residence. As we stood leavetaking we noticed approaching a small hay-cart drawn by a pony. On this cart I observed a long, flat, black box; it was a rough coffin, just smeared over with cheap black paint.

"Who is dead?" I asked of a girl with milk-pails.

"It is the funeral of Ingebricht Molde, a young fellow of twenty; he died of the fever two days ago. His brother is taking him to Tor to bury."

"And no one else?" I inquired; "is he going all alone?"

"Yes; they are afraid. There will be no service till the pastor comes in three weeks."

"I say!" exclaimed Captain Branksome, "I've seen a good many melancholy funerals, but none so forlorn as this."

As he spoke he stood aside, and lifted his cap as the solitary vehicle slowly passed us.

Then, moved by an inexplicable impulse, I went forward and scattered all my flowers on the bare coffin; the other two immediately followed my example, and Captain Branksome said, "Well, I'm going all the way. I can't stand this! The boy will want someone at the grave, and I know all about it. I've helped to bury people before now."

"And I'll go as far as the ferry," I said.

"And so will I," added Dovey.

It was a strange *cortège*—the three of us, complete strangers, slowly following the poor remains down the valley to the river's edge. People we met stood and looked after us with grave-eyed amazement. At the ferry the cart and pony were put across in a flat boat, Captain Branksome accompanied them. Dovey and I stood and watched him till they reached the other side, where he helped the boy to get the pony and his load up on to the level, and then they two turned away, to where the little sharp spire cut the evening sky.

"He is a dear, good-hearted fellow," cried Dovey, "and I love him for his kindness and sympathy."

"Yes, Dovey," I assented, "he is all you state, but

you must not love more than *one* at a time—it is not allowed in the Happy Valley."

"Oh, Miss Bosworth! you do say such odd things."

"Is it odd to say true things, Dovey? And if you and the sailor down below do care for one another—you have my most cordial assent."

"Yes," and her smiling face became suddenly grave, her sunny eyes clouded, "we do care, but what's the use? We would have to wait half a century or longer. All I have is £30 a year, and he has just £100, besides his pay"—so they had been talking it over—"and of course he wishes to get on, he is so keen—still—he says—he says——"

"What does his sister say, Dovey?"

"She implores me to say 'yes'; but what is the use? Of course, I shall never, never marry anyone else, but——" and Dovey broke down and put her handkerchief to her face and cried silently.

I made no effort to console her; but I had a scheme in my head.

Our stay was rapidly drawing to an end, the days were shortening; we had taken kindly to big log fires, and the fish list on the drawing-room wall was approaching the bottom of the paper. Enid had been ten days at the farm, and Dovey and I were jointly interviewing her from the hill the afternoon succeeding that of the funeral; the volunteer nurse looked

remarkably well and businesslike as she stood gazing up at us, with her hands in the pockets of her great apron.

"They are all up," she announced, "in two days I may be free—they do great credit, the doctor says, to the old grannie and to me."

"Especially to you!" I put in.

"Such dear, simple, good people! I shall be so sorry to go!"

"Good gracious!" ejaculated Dovey. "Well, at any rate, we are longing to have you back."

Enid extricated one hand, and blew her a kiss. "And how is my friend Mr. Clegg?" Suddenly an extraordinary change came over her face—words died on her lips—she was gazing with great astonished eyes at something behind me, and I heard a familiar voice exclaim—

"Enid! Hallo! So there you are! What a chase I have had to find you!"

"Gilfrid!" she screamed, "how did you get here? How did you discover me?"

"Foster saw you in Bergen, and gave me a clue." And he ran down the bank as he spoke.

"Keep away! Keep off! Don't come near me," she urged, with outstretched arms.

"Nonsense! I'm no more afraid of the fever than you are, and you don't suppose, my dear Enid, that I have come all the way from India, and dragged Norway with a net to find you—in order to 'keep away'?"

And there below us stood the two long-separated lovers face to face—the nurse in her cap and apron; the strong man from the north, confronting her; they were a remarkably suitable and handsome couple. Dovey and I instinctively drew back—not that we could hear one single word; and presently they turned away, she keeping him still at arm's length until they reached the farmhouse. They walked at a snail's pace—halting and exclaiming; when she reached the door he would have followed her, but she slammed—yes, actually slammed it in his face! Then we set off homewards, feeling that, perhaps, we had no business to witness this interview, but had barely gone ten yards when Captain Branksome was beside us, a little out of breath. How he must have raced up the hill!

"She has told me what a brick you are, Miss Bosworth, and that you know everything," he gasped.

"I know a good deal," I answered, and Dovey as I spoke—like a bright, intelligent girl—dropped quietly behind.

"It was well I came home, I think! The moment I got those letters—Enid's and Lady Fred's—I went to the colonel. I had been away shooting up in Thibet, and when I got my *dak* it was nearly a month old—and so much can happen in that time."

"So much can happen in a few minutes," I declared.

"Yes. Well, I hurried down to Serinugger within the hour, pushed with all speed to Meerut, and saw the colonel, and asked for leave to England, by the outgoing mail, the next day."

"Yes; it was really urgent private affairs."

"Well, the colonel is a rare good sort, but he pointed out that I'd just come off leave that instant; that I was playing in our regimental team in the polo tournament; that the inspection was at hand; and that, in short, it could not be done."

"No, I suppose not."

"Then I said, 'Sir, it's a matter that concerns me vitally—it's almost life or death.' But I think he imagined that I was joking—so much for having a character for unflagging cheeriness—it was 'No, no, no.' So I simply went over to my own quarters and wrote him an official——, and sent in my papers. It was a terrible wrench. I love the service, but Enid comes first; and I knew that she was in awful trouble, and that I was bound to see her through. Well, I'd lost four precious weeks, and I came home —instead of writing."

"Yes, you were wise," I admitted.

"I landed at Marseilles, and I went straight to the hotel and had the whole terrible business cleared up, saw medical men, and relations and lawyers, and I found out that that poor chap had twice been put up; that his mother died mad, that he had attempted his

life several times, and had violent crazes. It might have befallen any girl—it was hard luck on poor Enid! Then that abominable woman, her aunt by marriage, instead of consoling her, made capital out of the tragedy, and poisoned the minds of everyone who would listen to her. Enid was in a state of collapse, and she carried her off home along with the poor doting old man, and cleverly stepped into the post of mistress and manager. She neglected Enid disgracefully, refused to allow people to see her, had no proper advice—in short, behaved like a fiend. Only the housekeeper wrote to Lady Seabourne, I really don't know what would have been the end. Enid was in a low state, she could not eat, she could not sleep, she never went out, she never saw anyone, she believed that her neighbours shrank from her, and was slowly preparing for an asylum or the grave."

"Yes," I assented, "she was dangerously depressed."

"I must confess that Mrs. Thoroughgood showed wonderful sense; the rest and this new life have cured her. Mrs. Thoroughgood would not even tell *me* where Enid was; she said she had agreed with the specialist to no letters and no visits. So I took the matter into my own hands, and simply scoured this country. I knew she was somewhere north of Bergen. When I came into this valley for the second time, and heard of two girls at Mrs. Valdy's, immediately my hopes rose; but I never could see number two—

and Miss Bassett put me off. However, I waited, and that day I called, I had a kind of instinct that *she* was the volunteer who had gone out nursing, and the gentleman's description of her clinched the matter! He put me on the trail."

"So it is all cleared up," I said, "and I'm so glad. Mr. Clegg little dreamt what assistance he gave you!"

"No, but Knox tells me that someone—possibly the amiable Mr. Clegg—has actually been spreading this hideous libel here—something about a lover, and her jilting him, and his being a married man."

"A sort of snowball scandal!"

Here to my amazement we were passed by a cart, in which was seated Mr. Clegg in his brown Sunday suit. He glared at my escort and gave me a gloomy nod; I noticed a portmanteau in the cariole.

"Where the dickens is that fellow going?" inquired Captain Branksome.

"Away, I hope! Strange, we were just talking of him. *Parle du diable et on voie sa queue!*"

"But about this scandal?" resumed my companion. "It is disgraceful! I shall speak to Mrs. Valdy—it must be silenced at once."

"And what about the aunt, Lady Fred?"

"I found her securely established when I went to Court Place, and she actually refused to see *me!* The old servants were leaving, even the poor old man's attendant; expenses were cut down; horses

sold; she had let the Scotch moor; but I soon stopped all that. I sent my cousin, Lady Sally, down, and my man of business, and a competent doctor; the old gentleman is now in his second childhood; Lady Fred has had to quit. My cousin will stay with the poor old fellow till Enid goes home."

"And that will be soon, I suppose?"

"I hope by the end of the week—Lord Scarcliffe is on the move, and Knox, and they can do chaperon —by the next steamer."

"Oh, fancy Lord Scarcliffe doing the heavy father! what a delicious idea!—he who hates women!"

"I defy him to hate Enid! Well now, here we are—at your diggings. Do you think I may come in and have a talk to Mrs. Valdy? I want to thank her for all her kindness, and tell her that a nurse will replace Enid to-morrow. Enid will burn all her belongings and, if permitted, return here for a few days."

I peeped into the drawing-room and discovered Joan and the General alone, they were reading at opposite ends of the apartment, sitting ostentatiously apart.

"Joan," I said, "here is Captain Branksome. He has something he wishes to say to you about Miss Riversdale." And then I withdrew.

In about twenty minutes Joan came bustling into my room. She had heard all. It was clearly Mr.

Clegg's fault, he really was a most odious and ill-natured person. Needless to add I was, of course, much too magnanimous to say, "I told you so!"

"I feel I have behaved so badly to Enid," she said, "and I shall apologise; but I don't understand or get on with girls as you do, Rachel."

"You have not done badly with your girls! One is going to marry a charming naval officer, and the other will be a marchioness."

"Oh, but Jack has no money," she objected.

"But I have. Of course this is masonic—a dead—dead secret."

"You dear old goose! you sentimental Rachel! How good of you—you'd like to marry off all the valley, I do believe."

"Perhaps I could have married myself off had I chosen!" I rejoined; "and unless I am mistaken, you too could have changed your estate."

Joan became scarlet, and faltered, "How *did* you guess?"

"We have all been guessing, including the General; and, let me tell you, Joan, he did not like it one little bit. He is a good, kind, easy-going gentleman, but he did not enjoy sitting by and hearing Mr. Clegg disposing of your fishing rights—leasing the upper pool and talking of hot-water pipes, and a motor. *When* did he speak?"

"Only to-day, returning from fishing. I'd been afraid it was coming sooner, but I fenced it off.

Fancy *me!* and his daring to think that my civility meant affection! He began as we were walking back from the river. I am afraid I lost my temper, and he lost his, and said I'd given him unmistakable encouragement, and that, anyway, a woman in my position ought to marry and have a man to direct her affairs, instead of allowing mysterious females to join my party and make scandals in the valley." Here she choked for a moment. "I did not say much; I controlled myself, for he was, in a way, my guest; but I walked into the house in silence, wondering what I could do. *How* was I to rid myself of Mr. Clegg? and and he *is* a Clegg, you are right. Was it possible that *I* should have to turn out of my own house—whilst *he* remained—and ask the Derings to shelter me?"

"Well, but we passed him in a cariole as we walked home. He certainly looked most forbidding,—but he also looked like a parting guest."

"Yes; he telephoned to Lady G., and begged leave to report himself, and she answered, 'Only too delighted.' So he is gone; there was only another week to put in, at any rate."

"And we shall all be returning on the same steamer! What scenes! How exciting it will be!"

"Rachel, how can you laugh? I've never had such an experience. Imagine his daring to propose to me! Can you grasp such—such—audacity?"

(To realise Mr. Clegg's audacity required no mental effort on my part.)

"What sensational stories he will tell Lady G.!" I exclaimed. "I wish I were a fly on the wall."

"Yes, but he won't have it all his own way. Captain Branksome knows Sir Robert; he is going down there to-morrow morning to thresh out this scandal and to bring Mr. Clegg to book."

"How energetic, and I must say with Oscar, 'Right! right!'"

"And for this last week he is coming here to stay. He can have Mr. Clegg's room."

"You wish to make an *amende* to Enid?"

"Yes, I do, and I shall go myself and fetch her to-morrow. Of course she will be disinfected."

"Yes, in every respect. But, dear me! how awkward for all of us, Joan—an engaged couple here, and only one sitting-room! The garden, too, is very exposed—no summer-house, and most of the windows overlook it."

"Let us hope they are not demonstrative. Well, it will be the first time I've ever had a pair of lovers under my roof."

"You must ask up Jack Waller, and we will arrange a sort of 'love feast'—two couples!"

"Yes," she said, and she coloured; "and what about another pair?" She paused for a reply, but I waited to hear the sequel, and after a moment's hesitation, she added: "I mean—yourself and the General? You—you hinted that; you—you might, you might."

"Oh, my dear Joan!" I burst out laughing, "*this* is quite the funniest idea that has been presented to me since I came up the Randval! In the first place, you know that I shall never, never marry anyone. As to the General, pray have you ever heard him lecturing me at bridge?"

"I have," she answered briskly, "and it was partly that that gave me the idea. Really, from the way he scolded you, you might have been his *wife!*"

CHAPTER XXVII

GOOD-BYE, RANDVAL

THE days succeeding this period of changes and chance—of encountering startling developments, so to speak, at every corner—were a time of delightful enjoyment, only tempered by the slight flavour of sadness which tinges last weeks, last picnics, last visits. Certainly our young couple seemed to diffuse an atmosphere of happiness around them, and Captain Branksome was immediately accepted as one of ourselves, and of the inner circle. He was full of energy, high spirits, and daring; it was miraculous the manner, in which, to borrow an American expression, he "took hold." He "took hold" of Joan, and appeared to be able to persuade her to fall into *all* his schemes. He organised a grand picnic to the mountain lakes; Joan and I rode up on ponies, and were subsequently stiff for days.

And we duly held "the betrothal feast." To this Lord Scarcliffe invited himself as guest. As usual, I arranged the flowers and decorations; Joan attended to the *menu*, and unexpectedly produced some excel-

lent champagne. I think his lordship did not regret his expedition—indeed, he was carried away into making a speech, and actually proposed "the health of Mrs. Valdy, promoter of sport and matrimony."

Our next festivity took the form of a dance to the neighbourhood. The drawing-room was turned into a ballroom, the garden received the supper-tables, the walk to the bridge was the promenade. We had the local music (including Ulaf's zither) as well as the piano, and all the girls and young men for seven miles. These danced their national dances and sang their national songs. Enid accompanied the singers, and we all caroused and ate and sang, and sat up till two o'clock in the morning. I ached with sheer weariness, but I had seldom enjoyed myself so thoroughly.

Then Enid gave a tea to the valley children, and Oscar turned out a great storehouse for this occasion; there was nothing he would not do for "that Missus," or, indeed, anyone in the valley, where she was adored.

"That Missus" and Joan made tea, whilst Captain Branksome and Toby Hopkins and Jack Waller waited. Afterwards we all played games with great enthusiasm. In my youth I was passionately fond of blind-man's buff. Five-and-twenty years I had been a grown-up, but I still took part in the fray with unabated zest—was I not entering on my second childhood? I wonder what Mrs. Beckington would

have said if she had seen me? She possibly would not have believed her eyes. I had half a sleeve and most of the gathers torn out of my lilac linen, and I bestowed the remains on Ildry, the milkwoman's niece; it would make her a smart frock for the dancing-house, Paulette would never see it, and no questions would (mentally) be asked.

To impart a secret—a dead secret—there was but scant fishing in these latter days. The serious fishing-lodge had been turned upside-down, and, so to speak, out of the windows.

It was all merry-making and junketing; even poor Toby Hopkins threw sorrow to the winds!

However, we had done remarkably well—more than well; we had beaten the record in take and weight of salmon.

I should say *they*, of course, but the glory of the achievement was transfused over all the inmates; Torva, our hated rival, was distanced by nine fish.

The last morning arrived. It was beautifully fine. A cloudless blue sky shone down upon us as the *stolkjærres* were drawn up in front of the verandah, and a great number of our friends assembled to bid us farewell and give us a parting handshake. The flag was hauled down, and we departed—two and two—*à la* Noah's Ark. First the General and Joan; they were followed by two engaged couples (as Jack Waller had joined our *cortège*—the Derings were to "fall in" at the ferry)." Then I came, partner

to Mr. Hopkins, who would have been engaged if he could! Lord Scarcliffe and Mr. Knox were immediately behind, and, last of all, our respective retinues. What a crowd we would be in the post-boat; and what a party—a whole table-full, weather permitting—on board the steamer, three establishments from the Randval. Luckily for us, the other lodge was not travelling by the same route.

A splendid passage crowned our enjoyment, and at King's Cross Station, where we had assembled, the party scattered each to their own homes.

Mrs. Beckington found me "shockingly brown and weather-beaten." My hands, too, were a grief—haymaking, log-rolling, gathering berries and flowers gloveless, were responsible for their complexion. To the present hour, the dear old lady cannot understand what I see to like in Norway, and she repeatedly asks, "But, Rachel, what *did* you do with yourself all day?"

My summer in northern regions has given me a wider outlook on life, a fund of new interests, and several warm friends.

I have visited Court Place, I have attended two weddings, and I am assured that I have become a confirmed match-maker.—At any rate, I do humbly confess that I am secretly in search of a nice, suitable wife for my excellent Toby Hopkins.—I have the pleasure of frequently seeing my late companions under my roof—the Branksomes, the Wallers, the

Derings, as well as Joan and the General. Perhaps I may yet be in a position to add the Bassetts and the Hopkinses — who knows? There is a wonderful bond of good-fellowship among us, and to the end of my days I shall contemplate with pleasure those months I spent in the "Happy Valley."

PLYMOUTH: WILLIAM BRENDON AND SON
PRINTERS



S APR 7

